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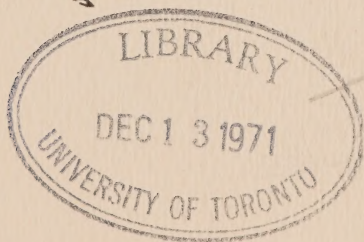
# GETTING PEOPLE TOGETHER

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## **GETTING PEOPLE TOGETHER**

(ORGANIZING A COMMUNITY GROUP)

PREPARED BY

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FOR

COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT BRANCH

ONTARIO

DEPARTMENT OF THE PROVINCIAL SECRETARY AND CITIZENSHIP

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I

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# GETTING PEOPLE TOGETHER

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	PAGE
PART ONE – INTRODUCTION . . . . .	1
PART TWO – GETTING TOGETHER . . . . .	3
The Initial Contact Group . . . . .	4
The Founding Committee . . . . .	5
Building on the Founding Committee . . . . .	5
The Constitution Committee . . . . .	6
Temporary Executive . . . . .	6
Where Should We Hold Meetings? . . . . .	7
When Should We Meet? . . . . .	8
Planning Your First Public Meeting . . . . .	8
Adjustments Under “Crisis” Conditions . . . . .	12
PART THREE – STAYING TOGETHER . . . . .	14
Sources of Assistance . . . . .	16
Alternative Sources . . . . .	17
When to Quit . . . . .	18
PART FOUR – SOME OF THE MORE TECHNICAL QUESTIONS . . . . .	20
Structure or Be Free . . . . .	20
Communications and Publicity . . . . .	22
Involving More People . . . . .	24
Relationships with Other Groups . . . . .	26
Gathering Information . . . . .	27
The Role of the Community Worker . . . . .	28
Conclusion . . . . .	29
APPENDIX A – Sample Clauses or Articles for a Citizen . . . . .	
Group Constitution . . . . .	30
APPENDIX B – Bibliography . . . . .	32

## **PART ONE**

### **INTRODUCTION**

#### **You Are Not Alone – It Has Been Done Before!**

This booklet has been written in response to many requests made to the Community Development Branch regarding assistance in the establishment of community or neighbourhood groups. The following pages are intended only to serve as a general guide and should not be regarded as the final answer in organizing your group.

The past several years have seen a great increase in the involvement of people in the life of their communities. No matter what you see as the reason for forming a group, you are not alone – thousands of Canadians have gone along the same route. Most of them with interests similar to yours will be happy to help or communicate with you.

*Prodigious actions may as well be done  
By weaver's issue, as by prince's son*

Dryden, Aboalom and Achitophel  
Part i, 1.638

*There is an idea abroad among moral people  
that they should make their neighbours good.  
One person I have to make good: myself. But  
my duty to my neighbour is much more  
nearly expressed by saying that I have to  
make him happy — if I may.*

R. L. Stevenson, A Christmas  
Sermon

*Every man's neighbour is his looking glass*

James Howell, Proverbs



## PART TWO

### GETTING TOGETHER

There is only one simple requirement for starting a citizen group — people must see a need for it.

The initial organization can play a vital role in how the organization or group develops, and how effective it is in meeting its purposes. Some groups form gradually over a period of several weeks, while others are created to meet a 'crisis' issue when time is of the essence.

The groups formed over a longer time usually have the greatest long-term impact on people.

Even when working in a rush, it is wise to know how most groups get off the ground. An outline of how many Ontario groups have begun is therefore followed by some suggestions for adjustments that can be made under 'crisis' conditions.

Some questions should first be answered by anyone thinking about starting a group:—

**(1) WHAT IS IT FOR?**

Apart from the overall benefits of involvement in a community, what are likely to be the purposes and objectives around which people will form a group?

**(2) WHAT WILL IT DO?**

The initiators of a group should have some ideas or suggestions about what a new group could do to meet a need. The membership must, however, make all the final decisions. The impact of many people working together is so great that the thinking becomes "what WE want" instead of "what THEY want."

**(3) WHO IS LIKELY TO JOIN IT?**

Is it to be local neighbourhood group or a geographically wider community of interest? Can it provide incentive for potential members to join?

#### (4) **IS A NEW GROUP REALLY NEEDED FOR THIS PURPOSE?**

Does one already exist? It is wise to look and ask around before starting a new group. You might end up in competition with one that has exactly the same objectives for the same people. There are times when a new group is necessary, when an old one has stagnated, but you would be very wise to first seek out expert opinion (see "Sources of Assistance," p. 16) as to whether you might be further ahead to revitalize an existing organization.

It is essential to be thinking clearly about the reasons for a new group, because people will soon be asking questions. Thoughtless answers can mean lost potential members, so to help you, the questions could also be restated another way.

(1) *What* do you want to do?

Why?

(2) *Who* do you want to do it?

Why?

(3) *When* do you want to do it?

Why?

(4) *How* do you want to do it?

Though these questions may seem childishly simple and perhaps even too basic, try them on yourself and others. You may be surprised at some of the different answers you get from people you thought were all agreed. Then with brief, but clear and understandable answers to these questions ready, you have the beginning of a group.

### **THE INITIAL CONTACT GROUP**

When you have sorted things out in your own mind, the next step is to find from four to a dozen other people who share your ideas. In a neighbourhood, this is easy if the concern you feel is widely reflected. Just talk to friends and neighbours. Some may be interested, but reluctant to "get involved." Remind them that no special talents are required. For example, your concerns may relate to children, staff at local schools might help, and parents of some of your own children's friends may share your ideas.

It's then a simple step to arrange an informal meeting at a convenient time and location when you have found the nucleus for a group. A private home is by far the best place for a relaxed, informal atmosphere. Talk over collectively your mutual ideas.

## THE FOUNDING COMMITTEE

A 'Founding Committee' is really another name for a steering committee, but one which suggests less formalized structure. The name adequately defines the purpose.

The initial contact group may define itself as the 'Founding Committee' to initiate action, or it may try to arrange an open public meeting to see if additional people can be attracted at this stage.

The job of the Founding Committee is not to make a lot of decisions, but to seek out alternatives, to let people know the group is being formed, and to present firm suggestions about how it should proceed. Depending on the size of the group, the founding committee can, if that amount of formality is desired, also perform the functions of the 'Constitution Committee'. (See section on Constitution Committee below.)

## BUILDING ON THE FOUNDING COMMITTEE

Members of the group tend to recommend themselves by their own interest in the early stages, but many groups like to start letting people know they exist. A stampede doesn't often result, but some additional support can be added.

If the group is to be a community, ratepayer, or tenant type, serving a small well defined district, a church or school in the area may be willing to help reproduce a leaflet describing the ambitions of the new group, and perhaps suggesting an informal meeting for anyone interested.

THE FIRST MEETING A GROUP HOLDS IS A VERY IMPORTANT ONE. (A separate section will give several suggestions.) If an informal meeting is desired, a smallish room in a central location is best. Arrangements can usually be made for the use of a staff lounge at a school or a small meeting room at a church. Have more available, but don't put out more than about twenty chairs. However optimistic you may feel, it is always better psychologically to have to add additional chairs than to have a few people scattered among a hundred empty seats.



## THE CONSTITUTION COMMITTEE

As mentioned above, the functions of this short-term committee can quite easily be served by the founding (or steering) committee, or by the temporary executive. This is especially so if it is a very small group. However, if your first contact group feels a constitution is needed, and enough people are available and interested, it is far better to get them actively contributing right from the start. Avoid having a small group doing all the work unless no one else is presently available. To maintain their interest, some people might be invited to develop the constitution for the group. (Most groups have some informal statement of purpose or intent, but many others still like a formal constitution).

The need and relative benefits of having or not having a constitution are discussed in Part IV. Here, it is enough to suggest that if the group intends to handle any funds it is usually considered to be beneficial to have a constitution that includes directions for control of group moneys.

Some sample clauses for citizen group constitutions are included in an appendix at the back of this booklet.

The constitution committee should try to have proposals for the group constitution ready to present to the founding meeting for approval. Sometimes, changes are voted or additions or deletions made by the membership, and the committee has to incorporate such changes in the final constitution. Once this job is completed, the constitution committee is disbanded, and its members go on to other activities. The committee can always be revived if there seems to be a need.

## TEMPORARY EXECUTIVE

There are two big reasons why a group's first executive committee should be appointed for a short term only.

In the first place, you will expect your group to grow and may make contact with interested and helpful people after it has started. You may want some of these people on your executive.

Even more important is the fact that, at the outset, people will know very few of those attending the meetings, and even a nodding acquaintance gives little idea as to how capable people may be in a certain role. Some of those elected may also be new to

citizen involvement, and find they would be happier if they didn't have the worry of a leadership role once they try it.

It is suggested, then, that it would be very wise to elect your first executive committee for about a three-month term to start with, then for a nine-month term, and annually thereafter.

NEARLY ALL CITIZEN GROUPS HAVE AN "EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE" OR AT LEAST A GROUP THAT PERFORMS THE FUNCTIONS OF ONE, BUT THE NAME MAY SOUND TERRIBLY FORMAL TO YOU. IF IT DOES, CHANGE IT TO ANY NAME ACCEPTABLE TO YOUR MEMBERS, BUT MAKE SURE EVERYONE KNOWS WHAT IS EXPECTED OF HIM.

### WHERE SHOULD WE HOLD MEETINGS?

A neighbourhood or community type of group should try to find a location central to the area it wishes to serve. Many Ontario school boards are beginning to make school facilities available in the evenings without charge to worthwhile community organizations, and your local school authorities or trustees can advise you if this applies to your area.

Some churches are also willing to accommodate you, as long as the day and time you select does not conflict with any of their own meetings. You will find they often have to obtain approval of various boards or committees, so give them plenty of notice.

Many other possible places suggest themselves — libraries, union or legion halls, municipal buildings and so on.

Don't get carried away and book a room for which you have to pay a lot of money. You may find the payment coming from your own pocket. Also, don't book too large a room so those attending become 'lost' in it, or have to shout to be heard. For a small meeting, a lounge is usually better than an auditorium, and a cosy basement better than a huge Sunday School room.

Space is almost always available when you start looking around — in fact you'll probably be quite surprised at how helpful many people are once your group gets going.

A special interest group — for example, a city-wide group forming to work on pollution problems — should try to find a

location as central as possible within the city to avoid having anyone travel too far. Also, keep in mind that some of those who come may not be familiar with the district. If you have a choice, a location on a main road is preferable to a small side street. Try to give some simple directions, and find out ahead of time what the parking situation is like at the time you want to meet.

## **WHEN SHOULD WE MEET?**

Most groups are best served by holding meetings in the evenings. Some, such as a women's coffee club or the "Take-a-Break" groups, have to meet in the daytime as may some especially designed for shift workers. In general, however, evenings are best. Young children are in bed, and babysitting is usually available. Working people are also home after supper and may be attracted out for something worthwhile.

8 P.M. is a commonly used starting time, but keep in mind the interests of the people you hope to attract. Few men would want to give up an interesting hockey game on TV for example!

Not so long ago, Tuesdays and Thursdays were always considered good "meeting" nights. However, there are so many activities going on these days that some organizations find Mondays less competitive for people's time. Fridays are bad, being a common shopping night, entertainment night, or people may be off somewhere for a weekend. Weekends are generally disastrous except for occasional special events, but some groups are finding Sunday evenings increasingly acceptable.

## **PLANNING YOUR FIRST PUBLIC MEETING**

Many new groups have been extremely disappointed when, having finally got to the point of calling their first public meeting, only a handful of friends and relatives show up!

It is no longer enough to reserve space, stick a notice on a lamppost, and wait for everyone to arrive! Your first meeting must have particularly careful planning and publicity. Try to put yourself outside the area of being directly involved, and ask yourself, "Would I go to that meeting?" "Who's holding it?" "What's it for?" "Is it worth paying a babysitter?"

These are some of the questions that you have to answer before they are asked, in your pre-meeting publicity.

A lot may depend on what main issues you are organizing your group around. You can probably count on solid support from neighbours if it's because a developer wants to erect a high-rise apartment in your back yard!

If your 'thing' is to be to provide children's recreation or after school care, then of course all parents — especially working parents — have reason to be interested, and your local school may like to help with publicity. A group that has the desire to go into several fields of endeavour will likely start in a very small way, and grow more slowly than one with a big immediate issue to face, but that group will often be stronger and longer lasting for the slower growth under sound leadership.

When planning that all-important first meeting, therefore, you will find that most or all of the following points are worth considering:—

- (1) Try to set a *date* about three weeks ahead if you can. This will allow time to work on publicity.
- (2) Call or write your *local newspaper(s)* and *radio station(s)*, advising them about the meeting and why it is being called. Unless you want to avoid the press, invite them to the meeting. (Some groups are adamantly opposed to the presence of reporters, especially if they are to be engaged in some sort of "pressure" action. It takes experience to really decide when the press may be helpful but, as a general rule, they can help with publicity that is necessary to get your group off the ground.)
- (3) *Letters to the 'Editor'* about the main issues you wish to present can arouse interest in these issues before people hear about the meeting.
- (4) If your meeting concerns a local geographical area, *door-to-door newsletters* can help — but don't expect great results from these alone. Teenagers are often a big help with distribution and can do a very responsible job. If time permits, a knock at each door with personal delivery is much better, and gives you an opportunity to answer 'on-the-spot' questions.
- (5) Make sure your leaflet or newsletter contains *a point of contact* — address and telephone number, with several names of



people in your group. This may encourage people to contact you, and will assure them that this is a local project started by their neighbours.

- (6) Remind all on your initial contact group, or committee, (and their wives and husbands) to *mention the proposed meeting to friends* and neighbours at every opportunity. Try to get a firm commitment from each contact.
- (7) About two weeks ahead, ask *local ministers* to announce the meeting (and the reason for it) to their congregations.
- (8) Try to arrange for a *well-known guest* to be at your meeting to speak briefly and perhaps answer some questions. It does not have to be a nationally famous figure, but someone known and respected locally or whose name has been in the news about the issue(s) in which you are interested. Some may come to hear this guest who might not otherwise have shown interest.
- (9) Ensure your publicity mentions the *name* of that person, and the reason, if possible, why he or she will attend (i.e. to speak on pollution, etc.).
- (10) Avoid any temptation to pad out the program with someone's home movies of last summer's trip to Vancouver. A *short brisk meeting* that strays on the subject at hand will encourage people to come back. Those who feel they would have been better to stay in front of their TV sets may never come back.
- (11) If you can, try to arrange for coffee and *refreshments* — usually cookies or doughnuts are enough. This will encourage people to stay around after the formal meeting. They will get to know each other, and increase the possibility of adding to your action group.
- (12) *Recognize that not everyone is "action-oriented."* If your group plans a militant or activist program, try to include something for those who, for whatever reason, prefer a more sedate life. This will broaden your membership base, and also improve your chances for later success.
- (13) Select a *chairman* for your first meeting with great care. If the chairman of the steering committee, or founding committee, has had little experience or still lacks confidence, it



may be wise to invite a guest chairman for the evening. Make yourself available to him (her) well before the meeting — at his convenience — so that he understands exactly what you are trying to do. This could be a chairman of another local group, a minister or priest, a member of the Legislature or local municipal politician, or someone from one of the organizations listed under “Sources of Assistance.” Your group chairman or president would introduce the guest chairman to the meeting, and get the feel of how to run future meetings. In some cases, people are coming together to generally talk over their concerns. In this case a chairman might not be needed.

- (14) To start the meeting, either present those who come with a *written background* of why you felt it necessary to call the meeting or explain why it was felt a citizen group was needed.
- (15) Make sure that someone in your group will be prepared to take *notes* (or ‘minutes’).
- (16) Plan a meeting of the group leaders or elected committee as soon as possible after the first meeting to start on the *follow-up*.
- (17) Before *closing* the meeting, make sure everyone knows what has been decided, and what is to happen next. Your chairman can be asked to help by summing up at the close. Always set a date — even if approximate — for a follow-up.
- (18) *Always be guided by what has come out of the meeting*, especially by a vote. It is easy for the organizers to feel they know better than those attending and there is often a temptation to go ahead in their own way regardless. This can only result in no local support, and no group. It may even cause the formation of an opposing organization.
- (19) You may want to have a *committee, or executive*, elected; if so, do it near the end of the meeting as many attending may be strangers. They will want an opportunity to hear different people’s views before voting. **AT THIS MEETING — AND THIS MEETING ONLY — CONCENTRATE ON THE ISSUES FIRST AND THE PEOPLE LATER.** By issues, this includes issues as they affect people, but ever afterwards consider people first. **THIS IS THE PARTIAL EXCEPTION TO THE GENERAL RULE.**

- (20) Be equipped with pens and sheets of lined paper or a cheap exercise book, and ask those attending to *register with name, address and telephone number*. You can then be sure of getting back to those individuals with any follow-up notices.

## ADJUSTMENTS UNDER “CRISIS” CONDITIONS

A group that is forming to face a crisis, of whatever kind, has to be able to organize very quickly. It often cannot follow the procedures outlined here simply because time does not permit. A meeting has to be called very quickly, wherever space can be hastily arranged. Notice of meeting will likely be by word of mouth — you hope to get as many as possible to start, and that others will hear or be contacted to join in later. Functions like founding committees, constitutions, and so on can wait until the action is under way to meet the crisis.

Your first meeting will likely be devoted almost entirely to a discussion of what strategies will be used. Don't forget however, that it will still be necessary to provide some background information for some people before they can contribute effectively. (Remember the questions on Pages 3 and 4). Action-oriented resource people will help as long as they are content to remain in an advisory capacity and not try to dictate the action. This is often hard for someone wholly geared to action.

Some 'crisis' groups get into arguments about who is supposed to be speaking on their behalf. It is wise to decide early on, who is to handle press releases, who will try to get the issue raised on TV or radio news if that applies, and who is to contact the necessary authorities (Councils, Governments, etc.).

OVER ENTHUSIASTIC MEMBERS OF THE GROUP CAN OFTEN BE IMPETUOUS AND GO AHEAD ON THEIR OWN TO THE DETRIMENT OF THE GROUP.

Research material can be expensive, and almost impossible for a group to obtain on short notice. Some bodies, like social planning councils, have archives full of research material on a variety of subjects, and some of these may help. Most groups, however, stay on “PEOPLE” issues rather than research. If the issue is big enough, others with more funds and staff at their disposal will pick up on the research. Make sure they know of your group, and that the

group has an opportunity to feed information into the research body. This will increase the likelihood of the research findings supporting your stand.

Having formed a group to meet a crisis, you will have to decide whether to meet this one issue only, or to continue (see on 'When to Quit'). This will also help you decide how much formality you need.

Handling a crisis issue is really a subject in itself, and will not be covered in greater detail here. Use your own discretion about obtaining help from the 'Sources of assistance' list.

### **Decision-Making**

Volumes have been written about the best method of decision-making. Some people feel that decisions should be made at the top by the chairman or executive committee. Others say that the members make the decisions and that the executive carry them out. There are also many variations between these choices.

The type of decision-making you will have will depend upon your members and the objectives of the group. So, keep the organization flexible until you can see what method best helps the group meet its objective.

## PART THREE

### STAYING TOGETHER

This section assumes that the group has gotten off the ground, and instead of being in the founding stages, it must turn its attention to the art of staying together.

#### WHAT ABOUT MONEY?

A group that is being formed solely for discussion purposes can operate very efficiently on very little money. Coffee and snacks may be provided at meetings, but dimes or quarters from those present can purchase supplies for the next get-together.

HOWEVER, THIS IS AN EXCEPTION — MOST GROUPS NEED *SOME* MONEY. AT THE BEGINNING THEIR ESTIMATES OF THEIR NEEDS ARE OFTEN GREATLY EXAGGERATED BUT, AS THE GROUP GAINS IN KNOWLEDGE AND EXPERIENCE, IT FINDS MANY THINGS AVAILABLE FREE FOR THE ASKING. THIS APPLIES ESPECIALLY TO THE LOCAL COMMUNITY ORGANIZATION.

The fact still remains that many multi-purpose groups, and some single-purpose groups, need money to get off the ground. If they don't find a way to raise it, there's a good chance the group won't continue for long — or if it does, it won't be as effective as it might be.

A word of caution, then. Although money may seem all-important to you in your early plans (and it may be that you are right), it is a question which you would be wise to talk over thoroughly amongst yourselves, and seek advice and opinions from others.

If you decide your group does need money, you then have to decide how to raise it.

A dance, for example, sounds like a good idea, but you usually have several expenses before the first tune is played. Often, a deposit must be paid on the hall you choose. There are prizes, refreshments and other supplies to buy before anyone steps inside the door. It can become uncomfortable if a member of your group finances the expenses and you don't raise enough to cover the costs.



Membership fees can also help you get started, but the amount raised is not generally enough to do very much. Also, if the membership fee is set too high in order to raise money, people may balk at joining an unknown organization that charges a substantial fee. A person may risk a dollar or two, but often won't chance five dollars, at least until the group has proved itself.

OF COURSE, IT ALSO DEPENDS ON THE GENERAL AFFLUENCE OF THE AREA IN WHICH YOU WISH TO ORGANIZE. IN A LOWER INCOME AREA, YOU MAY FIND THAT FIFTY CENTS IS ALL YOU CAN RAISE FOR MEMBERSHIPS WITHOUT DISCOURAGING POTENTIAL MEMBERS, BUT YOU MAY BE COMPENSATED BY MORE WILLING WORKERS MORE USED TO DOING A JOB THAN PAYING TO HAVE IT DONE.

A recent experiment for community groups has been to dispense with fees altogether. All residents of a stated area are automatically entitled to the benefits of membership, perhaps by simply signing a statement of interest in the group. This can really generate interest when people can find out about a group without risking any money, but it doesn't help the group treasury.

Fortunately, there are increasing sources of funds available to citizen organizations. Quite recently, the Community Development Branch of the Ontario Government recognized that need for some funding to help groups get started, and is often prepared to help a group start up with no strings attached, but this is only to get you started — after that, you're on your own. Depending on your program plans, other organizations or government departments may be prepared to help. There are some private foundations that take an interest, especially in some kind of innovative service, and some Federal Government departments will assist a project if it is of national significance — perhaps something that no one has tried before.

Most bodies, private or government, have certain criteria your group must meet in order to receive a grant. This is only to be expected as they are handling either public or trust funds.

You may also locate your own source of funds. The only caution is to see that there are no strings attached that could inhibit your group in what it wants to achieve.



The Community Development Branch of the Ontario Government has recently prepared a booklet which list a variety of sources of assistance available to community groups. Included are not only financial assistance but also consultative and staff resource, printed materials and so on. Copies may be obtained by writing to the Branch at Room 380, 151 Bloor Street West, Toronto 5.

All questions about raising money for community or citizen group purposes have not yet been answered, but progress is most certainly being made.

### SOURCES OF ASSISTANCE (and what to expect from each)

Several references have been made to the fact that help IS available to you on request.

The sources vary from one district to another, but one or more of the following are usually available to you at no charge:

*THE COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT BRANCH OF THE ONTARIO GOVERNMENT* EMPLOYS CONSULTANTS WHO WILL VISIT AND ASSIST YOU ON REQUEST. THESE CONSULTANTS WILL BE ESPECIALLY HELPFUL IN DISTRICTS WHERE CITIZEN ORGANIZATION IS NOT YET HIGHLY DEVELOPED, AND LITTLE LOCAL HELP IS AVAILABLE. LIKE THE AGENCY PEOPLE MENTIONED BELOW THEY WILL ANSWER YOUR QUESTIONS BUT WILL NOT ATTEMPT TO IMPOSE THEIR OWN IDEAS OVER YOUR OWN. ONE OTHER WAY THE BRANCH STAFF WILL HELP IS BY ASSISTING YOU WITH THE PREPARATION OF A FORMAL REQUEST FOR FINANCIAL HELP.

The *ONTARIO WELFARE COUNCIL* and several *SOCIAL PLANNING COUNCILS* around the Province employ some first-rate people who will be glad to help you if they can. These organizations also have "volunteer" arms, which are like any other citizen organization. However, the volunteers come from all areas and backgrounds, and *may* not be conversant with the citizen-group scene in any particular locality. Staff hours are generally nine to five, but we have yet to hear of a staff person refusing to help a group in an evening if asked.

THERE ARE, OF COURSE, MANY OTHER *SOCIAL AGENCIES* MAINLY SERVING ENTIRELY DIFFERENT FUNCTIONS. IF YOU HAVE A CONTACT WITH ANY OF THEIR STAFF, THEY MAY BE ABLE TO ASSIST YOU FROM THEIR OWN GENERAL KNOWLEDGE, OR PUT YOU IN TOUCH WITH SOMEONE MORE KNOWLEDGEABLE IN THE MATTERS YOU NEED HELP WITH.

SMALLER COMMUNITIES THAT DO NOT HAVE PLANNING COUNCILS, OR SIMILAR ORGANIZATIONS, SOMETIMES HAVE *UNITED COMMUNITY SERVICES*, AND SOME EMPLOY STAFF IN FUNCTIONS SIMILAR TO THE PLANNING COUNCILS IN LARGER CENTRES.

ANOTHER VALUABLE SOURCE OF HELP IS THROUGH THE *FEDERATED OR "UMBRELLA" CITIZEN GROUPS*, SUCH AS THE ONTARIO FEDERATION OF CITIZENS' ASSOCIATIONS, THE ONTARIO TENANTS' ASSOCIATION, OR VARIOUS GROUPINGS OF RATEPAYERS OR OTHER TYPES OF GROUP. THESE ARE, OF COURSE, ALL VOLUNTEERS — PEOPLE JUST LIKE YOU, WHO HAVE BEEN THROUGH THE MILL AND KNOW WHERE THINGS ARE AT. THEY CAN OFFER ADVICE AND ASSISTANCE FROM THEIR OWN DIRECT EXPERIENCE AND WILL USUALLY RECOGNIZE THE PROBLEMS YOU ARE FACING.

Finally, do not overlook the possibility of help from a group a few blocks away from you. It is not always easy to identify a group, or to locate its leaders — usually it's a question of asking around. Such a group, close to your own location, probably shares some of the same problems and will often be glad to help. In any event, its members will appreciate the knowledge that you have started a group, and what you hope to do.

### ALTERNATIVE SOURCES

There are some other places where you might obtain help, but be careful, because although the quality of the help you get may be quite adequate, it may harm the development of your group. This does not follow automatically, but you may not yet have the experience to recognize the signs of possible trouble ahead.

Many churches will help, and ministers, and they often have plenty of organizational experience; the same applies to local elected representatives.

There is no question about the genuine desire to help on the part of these persons, but you do stand the risk of having potential members of your group unwilling to feel identified with some particular religious or political persuasion. Some persons resent the active involvement of an elected member of a political party. In other instances, seeing a Roman Catholic priest involved, some Protestants MAY feel that it is a Catholic organization, and not for them. There is generally no justification for such fears, but it pays you to be cautious, especially at the beginning.

Some people are presenting themselves as “Community Workers,” but have little or no experience or training. Some of these undoubtedly well-intentioned people can do your group more harm than good, so be sure to check out the background if you consider approaching such a person, or are approached by one. Make sure he or she knows what he or she is talking about.

Similarly, if and when you accept any financial help, make sure your whole group knows the circumstances; there must be absolutely no strings attached other than a reasonable measure of financial accountability (#) and no suggestion that your group has been ‘bought’.

- (#) This means members have the right to see the money has been spent for the group, and not for some individual’s benefit, but not to use the provision of money to try to dictate the actions of the group.

## WHEN TO QUIT

Many groups will face the question, “Should we quit or carry on?” at some time in their existence — some face it quite frequently. Many groups form, in fact, around one issue only, and may have no need to continue after that issue is resolved.

FIRST OF ALL, KEEP FIRMLY IN MIND THAT THERE IS NO REFLECTION ON A GROUP OR ITS MEMBERS IF THEY DECIDE THE GROUP NO LONGER SERVES A PURPOSE. IT MAY BE MUCH BETTER FOR ACTIVE PEOPLE INVOLVED IN THEIR COMMUNITY TO MOVE ON TO OTHER CHALLENGES MORE DESERVING OF THEIR ATTENTION.

If the group has dwindled in numbers and enthusiasm to the point where it can no longer function, it is better to call a meeting of those still interested, and suggest a resolution to “kill” the

organization. Either this will happen, or the ensuing discussion might suggest new endeavours that might be undertaken to revitalize the group.

Any money left on hand could be passed, if members agree, to another active organization working for an acceptable cause, given to a charity or medical research fund acceptable to your members, or deposited in a bank until some future issue requires the formation of a new group. If this is done, make sure all your group (and the bank, of course) know to whom the money could be paid and under what circumstances. If the amount is substantial, legal help might enable you to set up a trusteeship.

Current thinking suggests this is better than the old way some groups operated in the past — meeting an issue, then going into ‘limbo’ for a few years until something else required attention. When that happens, no one knows for sure if the organization still exists, and any new or potential group workers in a community are reluctant to start up a new group and perhaps tread on a lot of toes. CONSEQUENTLY, MANY OPPORTUNITIES FOR EFFECTIVE WORK ARE MISSED WHILE EVERYONE WAITS FOR SOMEONE ELSE TO “DO SOMETHING.”

Self-evaluation by a group should be a continuing thing, and when that evaluation says it’s time to quit, don’t fight it.



## PART IV

### SOME OF THE MORE TECHNICAL QUESTIONS

The pages you have read so far should give a beginner some fair idea about how to form a group, and where to obtain help when it is wanted.

In the early days of your group, other questions may be raised and decisions may be faced that involve more than simply calling a group together and setting up a few meetings — questions about such technical sounding subjects like “communications,” “structure,” “group relationships” and so on.

THIS LAST SECTION WILL ATTEMPT TO GIVE YOU SOME IDEAS FROM THE VOLUNTEER'S POINT OF VIEW. IT WON'T ANSWER EVERY QUESTION THAT ARISES, BUT WILL GIVE SOME BACKGROUND INFORMATION TO HELP YOU FIND YOUR OWN ANSWERS WHEN THE NEED ARISES.

#### STRUCTURE OR BE FREE . . .

Some citizen groups seem to have been organized by the sort of people who are sticklers for every detail. They like to see a group's constitution or by-laws spell out everything to the maximum degree.

This is what is called a highly structured group — when everything is laid out in detail in an organization's rules and regulations. A perfect example might be your own Municipal Government, with all its committees, departments, and books full of by-laws necessary for it to function effectively. This is structure far in excess of the needs of a citizen group.

Most of us are reasonably familiar with this kind of structure, from observation if not experience, and even when we are organizing to meet one of these structured bodies, we tend to adopt the same kind of structure ourselves. It's often the only way we know.

On the other hand, a group might meet up with a recent university graduate who says, “Structure? What do you need structure for?” and then proceeds to explain how a group can dispense with tools like constitutions, executive officers, committees, by-laws, and so on.



“You don’t need a chairman or president,” he may say — “simply rotate the duties among your membership.”

There is enough truth in these arguments to make them sound believable, and it is admitted that this unstructured organization can be suitable to some types of group. Not only a debating club, but perhaps a council of local organizations sharing information, even if the local organizations are really committees of a handful of people. Each group could supply a chairman in rotation, and make its own notes of items of interest. Open forum groups, which may discuss issues but pass no resolutions and take no action, are another example.

FOR THE MAJORITY OF CITIZEN GROUPS — ESPECIALLY THOSE HANDLING MONEY OR ENGAGING IN ‘ACTION’ OF SOME KIND, THE TOTALLY UNSTRUCTURED SET-UP CAN BE HIGHLY DANGEROUS. IT PROVIDES NO RESTRICTION ON WHO IS TO HANDLE THE GROUP’S FUNDS, AND HOW; IT MAKES IT EVEN MORE DIFFICULT TO ESTABLISH CONTROL OVER HIGHLY ENTHUSIASTIC MEMBERS WHO INSIST ON GOING THEIR OWN WAY REGARDLESS OF GROUP OPINION. IT ALSO FAILS TO PROVIDE A FORMALIZED BASIS FOR SETTling DISPUTES AMONG MEMBERS.

It might also be added that the use of money by a group is one of the most frequent sources of discontent amongst members of that group.

One final hazard of the unstructured group is that it is more open to the smooth-talking individual who sees the group as a vehicle to be used for some hidden purpose — good or bad. When this happens, it is not until most of the original membership has left that someone asks, “What went wrong?”

Too much structure, on the other hand, can inhibit the group in a different way. If the purpose of the organization is detailed in the constitution as, “To organize and present objections to the re-zoning of . . . . . area.” then the group has given itself no mandate to work later on problems connected with day care in the area, youth activities, local pollution, or anything else.

The group could work on the same original project, and leave the future much more flexible if the constitution were to state instead:

“The purpose of . . . organization is to bring the greatest possible benefit to area residents in the fields of health, recreation, general education and social welfare.”

This sort of wording allows the group to do anything reasonable and still be free to face some future issue or crisis.

Many groups seem to have found the right balance between too much structure, and none at all; a new group should try to leave some provision for changes in its constitution at fairly frequent intervals as it grows in experience.

It is suggested that new groups, desiring some structure, limit the formality to an outline of the purpose of the group, control of money, duties and terms of its leaders, and future dissolution. It is always easier to add more when the group needs it than it is to remove structure once it has been created.

## COMMUNICATIONS AND PUBLICITY

Most groups need publicity at some time, either to reach out to potential new members, to advise the community at large about concerns or activities of the group, or to gain support around an issue.

At the same time, several groups have felt that the press has ‘used’ them, or their activities, only for sensationalism. Thus they become very reluctant to contact the media.

IT MAY CONSEQUENTLY BE WISE TO TAKE NOTE OF HOW YOUR LOCAL MEDIA HANDLES CITIZEN GROUP NEWS. DON’T FORGET THAT CITIZEN GROUPS ARE NEW TO YOU, AND MAY BE NEW TO THE MEDIA PEOPLE AS WELL – THEY MAY SIMPLY NOT UNDERSTAND WHAT YOU ARE DOING OR WHAT YOU ARE TRYING TO ACHIEVE.

It does seem reasonable to comment that the press will often give much more coverage to a sit-in or demonstration than it will to the constructive and on-going activities of most groups that may be rather less sensational, although equally or perhaps more worthwhile.

When your group wishes to advise the news media about a matter, the usual method is by a “Press release.”

This is a written statement by the group about the subject, and should advise the editor “WHO-WHAT-WHY-WHEN-WHERE.” It should also include the name and address of the sending group, and a contact person and telephone number for use if more information is required by the paper.

The press release should always be double-spaced, typewritten one side of a page only, with a wide margin on both sides. Try to use only one page if possible, and give the editor a clear indication when he has reached the end of the item. This is traditionally done by typing –30– two or three lines below the final line. Miss out on any of these suggestions, and you increase the risk that your press release will end up in the wastebasket.

Keep in your own mind, when sending a press release, that what seems to you to be a big story may not be so to a busy news editor. If you have the opportunity for a personal contact, take the release to the paper(s) in person.

Radio, and sometimes even TV should not be overlooked as useful media, either for press releases or public service announcements about forthcoming public meetings. Many stations are happy to co-operate if your group gives them fair notice.

MANY GROUPS REMEMBER THE NEED FOR COMMUNICATION, OR PUBLICITY, OUTSIDE THEIR MEMBERSHIP OR AREA, BUT SOMETIMES OVERLOOK THE EVEN MORE IMPORTANT NEED TO COMMUNICATE WITH MEMBERS AND POTENTIAL MEMBERS OF THE GROUP.

There are various ways to do this – one of the most effective is the periodic group newsletter. This is especially useful to a neighbourhood, community, or tenant group engaged in many different activities.

Internal communications can be seen as an important way of advertising. It's often not enough to put a message across only once – it should be done several times (if possible) to reach everyone. Each member of a group engaged in many functions, may be familiar with only a few of them.

Seek out your own method of communicating – newsletters a local news column in the weekly press, public meetings, word of mouth whenever possible, perhaps a system of area representatives each serving one block or one floor of an apartment building.

Your area representatives can also help with the distribution of notices or newsletters, and carry feed-back as well. This is most important.

EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATIONS MUST BE TWO-WAY COMMUNICATIONS. IT'S NOT ENOUGH FOR AN EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE TO ADVISE THE MEMBERSHIP ABOUT ALL THE GOOD WORK IT IS DOING. IT MUST HAVE THE ABILITY TO HEAR WHAT PEOPLE ARE SAYING IN THE AREA OR MEMBERSHIP, AND IT MUST BE ABLE TO RESPOND.

Good two-way communications will help to hold the group together, make it a viable and effective organization, and promote the ideal of frequent self-evaluation.

### INVOLVING MORE PEOPLE

Think about some of the more critical comments you may have heard from some people involved in citizen groups:

“The apathy around here is appalling”

“Our committee has to do everything”

“They all want the benefits, but no-one wants to help”

“We had several meetings, but hardly anyone came”

“We haven't had elections because no-one wants to run for office”

“People only come out if it's a big issue”

Any of these sound familiar? Are they valid complaints?

Let's look at some realities!

There IS apathy in many areas, but not as much as some people think. Many individuals ARE concerned, but have little knowledge to work from and are scared they might make themselves look silly. Some also fear retribution from some source or other. Many have grown up in an atmosphere of ‘keep cool — don't get involved’ or ‘the experts know best.’ These people need encouragement to participate and state their opinions.

A committee that ‘has to do everything’ often does so because it WANTS to do everything. Committee members feel a sense of



their own importance, and feel they can do a better job anyway. Not so. People very seldom volunteer for a job, but some would love to be asked!

No-one wants to help? One can't expect a mother of four or five young children to devote three evenings a week to supervising a drop-in centre. Nor can a man who works shift commit himself for regular attendance at anything, but MOST people are willing to take a share within their own capability. The more people your group has working, the less each individual has to do and the stronger the group becomes.

If people don't come to meetings, it may be because they didn't know about it, or didn't get enough notice to make suitable babysitting arrangements, had a prior commitment, or PERHAPS the topic under discussion was not of sufficient interest. Make sure your organization's meetings are interesting, and give everyone there a chance to participate. Everyone likes to believe his own opinions and views are important, AND IN A CITIZEN GROUP, *THEY ARE IMPORTANT.*

When nobody will run for office in an organization, it may be because those in office have taken too much on themselves and no one person will take it all over; it may be because they feel enmity might be caused with those gaining personal satisfaction from holding the office; it may also be BECAUSE NO ONE EVER ASKED, personally and sincerely!

People will come out for a big issue, because they recognize how it will affect them, and their lives or families. You don't get hundreds at any meeting, but careful publicity might point out how important a subject really is when people hadn't given it much thought before. An example might be the issue of pollution, almost unheard of a few years ago. This goes to show how very important your pre-meeting publicity is.

No one has yet found the whole answer to getting people involved, but a well-run group who can sincerely offer an invitation and a purpose will have the most success. Just remember (it cannot be over-emphasized) — we all like to feel that we count for something and that our personal views are important. When group leaders recognize this, they are on the way to having a well-supported group.

One word of warning. Don't get too carried away!



Some complaints have been heard about a group executive committee that tries to hand off everything, refusing to do even its own job. They, too, might wonder why more people don't get involved!

## RELATIONSHIPS WITH OTHER GROUPS

As your group gets itself organized, it will undoubtedly run into difficulties that seem, at first sight, insurmountable. As suggested in earlier sections, quite often a group that has been going longer can help.

Even beyond that, while many of the projects your group works on will be strictly local projects, there will also be times when you want to work on something that affects a borough, a whole city, a province, or even all Canada! For example, your group might want to start a day care centre, but isn't day care a national, or at the very least, a provincial problem? Many others must support your concerns. Your group might be organizing around a proposed zoning change, but won't that change also affect other communities around you? Pollution, while sometimes local in nature, is by no means a local problem only; neither is education, adult or children's.

You will therefore need to know who has groups going around you in the same general area, the same city, province, and so on. You may find several groups all sharing similar concerns, and collective action with them can not only save your members time and duplicated effort, but it may be also very much more effective if many groups co-operate.

There are organizations set up in the past year or two for these and similar reasons. They cannot possibly all be listed, but for a few examples, there is the Ontario Tenants' Association – and its purpose should be quite obvious, there are many 'umbrella' ratepayers organizations usually collected within a municipal government area, and there is the Ontario Federation of Citizens' Associations encompassing groups and interested individuals of all kinds. In addition, there are many informal meetings of groups in various places, often with no actual name. Once again, communication is essential.

Your group may be very well advised to affiliate with the 'umbrella' group of its choice – whichever seems closest to meeting your need. When doing so, make sure that your group

remains independent and autonomous (self-governing), and that it will be consulted fully before any decisions are made in its name. Most umbrella organizations are quite careful about this, but it pays to be sure. Check to see what (if anything) is required of your group, and what your group is offered.

**JUST AS WITHIN YOUR OWN GROUP, MEMBER ORGANIZATIONS WITHIN AN UMBRELLA BODY WILL RECEIVE AS MUCH AS THEY PUT INTO IT.**

Having made your choice, select your representatives, and be sure to make provision at your own meetings for them to report back to you about what is happening elsewhere. It makes no sense to be gathering information if no one in the group gets to hear it.

Many organizations don't realize the fact, especially at the early stages of their development, but many similar problems face tenants and ratepayers, welfare rights groups and businessmen's associations, food co-operatives and drop-in centres. When they all get together, citizen involvement will be a powerful tool indeed.

When you have gathered available information about the possible umbrella organizations with which your group might affiliate, it is wise to put the matter before your full membership rather than treat it as an executive decision only. Inter-group co-operation requires, at times, more than just a present committee, and potential future leaders should know what is going on. Make your recommendations, but, as in all things, allow the group to make the final decision knowing all relevant facts.

## **GATHERING INFORMATION**

Part of your relationship with other groups will be an in-flow of information useful to your group, and an awareness of "know-how" that might otherwise take months to develop. Depending on your special interests, your sources of information need not stop there.

A single-purpose organization can usually identify sources of information about its special interest simply by reading and listening.

A group formed for many different purposes has to go much further afield, and into a much wider range of subjects.

Affiliation with at least one member to other organizations can result in many leads to information when needed, or can add sources and contacts which are always good to have.

As a general list, applicable to most groups, the following might be considered important (not in order of importance):

Your local Social Planning Council

If in a community with no S.P.C., the Ontario Welfare Council

The 'umbrella' organization(s) of your choice

Any other group sharing your interests.

Furthermore, as many of your group as possible should get to know your local school trustee(s), alderman(men), provincial and federal members of parliament, school principal(s), local church clergy, and the staff of local newspapers. The local elected representatives are available and willing to help you with information about resources available and any concerns you may have.

Leaders, at least, should make contact with the Community Development Branch, and should become familiar with both government and private social services available in your community — welfare, marriage or family counselling, recreational, day care, emergency home-help services, services for pensioners, etc. Sooner or later, someone in your group will need such information.

**THE WHOLE PROCESS OF COLLECTING INFORMATION  
USEFUL TO YOUR GROUP SHOULD NEVER CEASE.**

## **THE ROLE OF THE COMMUNITY WORKER**

When you feel you have need of professional assistance, there are several 'consultant' services available to your group without charge. Generally speaking, these consultants, who will meet with you at your request on a matter of specific concern to you, are dedicated people on whom you can rely.

"Community Development" is becoming an increasingly popular phase, however, and all kinds and types of people are presenting themselves as 'community workers.' Some have neither field training — that is actually being involved within a group — nor academic training to qualify them for the job. Such people

MAY do your group more harm than good. The biggest fear groups have is the so-called community worker who only wants to use the group for his or her own purpose.

Fortunately, these are pretty rare, but there is no central registry or source of information about such people to help you to identify which kind any individual may be. It is suggested that, if you have doubts, you should check with either a known or recommended consultant, and find out where, when, and with what group(s) the prospective community worker has been involved. You will then be able to learn more even if from another city.

In the meantime — and the same applies to ANY community worker, you must make absolutely sure that he or she works under the direction of your group, and does the work your group wants him to do. He (or she, of course) must report back to your group, not to somewhere else giving you no control. Most good community workers DO work this way, and will appreciate you ‘laying it on the line.’ That’s just the way they would want it to be.

## CONCLUSION

This booklet cannot attempt to tell you everything about citizen and community groups.

It is hoped that you have received from it some basic ideas with which you can get started. By participating in a citizen group you are taking part in our democratic society in a meaningful way. The introduction said you would run into frustrations — and you will, but they are outweighed by many rewarding experiences.

“Citizenship” will be to you, and your group, something more than an expression or a piece of paper; whatever the nature of your group, each member may rightfully feel that his community, city, province, and country have received benefit from every effort — no matter how small.



## APPENDIX "A"

### Sample Clauses or Articles for a Citizen Group Constitution

The following suggestions have been put, as far as possible, into everyday language. They are adequate for most unincorporated groups. If your group plans to incorporate, a legal advisor should be consulted.

Start by stating the name of the organization, and who may join:

The name of the organization shall be the Harvest Heights Community Association, and it shall be comprised of such persons who reside in the Harvest Heights area and who have paid the required membership fee.

Then give the purpose of the group:

The Association shall be operated in a manner so as to bring the greatest possible benefit to area residents in the fields of health, recreation, general education, and social welfare.

The Association shall try to encourage the idea of citizen participation in community affairs.

The Association shall be a vehicle for collective action on matters of concern to its members.

If the group is to have officers (or executives), state how many, their titles, and how often they should be elected:

Annually, during the months of . . . . or . . . . , or at the first opportunity thereafter, the following officers shall be elected by the membership: Chairman, two vice-chairmen, secretary and treasurer. These five officers shall form the executive committee of the Association.

State what the membership fee is to be:

There shall be a membership fee of one dollar per family per calendar year, payable in advance.

and then, who is to control Association money:

All funds belonging or entrusted to the Association shall be under the control of the Treasurer, who will present a statement of accounts to the membership (quarterly, annually). All funds shall be deposited in a financial institution which is a member of the Canada Deposit Insurance Corporation, and the signatures of the Treasurer and any one other officer shall be required to withdraw funds.

You may then wish to restrict spending large sums:

All expenditures over (fifty dollars) shall be submitted to the general membership for prior approval.

Many groups like to include a clear statement about affiliations:

The Association may in no way be connected with, or affiliated with any single political party, religious institution or commercial enterprise. It may establish desired relationships with other citizen or community organizations that have no partisan political, religious or commercial affiliation, provided that no controls are imposed on the Association.

A group should always specify how future additions or amendments may be made to its constitution:

This constitution may be amended by simple majority vote at any Annual General Meeting.

And the final point, to allow for dissolution when the group is no longer functioning:

The Executive Committee may, at its discretion dissolve the Association if its members believe it no longer serves any purpose, with any funds left on hand (state disposal) .

Other items could of course be included — these are basics providing minimum structure. If you wish more, ask some other groups for copies of their constitution or by-laws for further ideas.

## APPENDIX "B"

### BIBLIOGRAPHY

Other books, leaflets or publications you may find useful:

Youth and Recreation Branch,  
Ontario Department of Education,  
559 Jarvis Street,  
Toronto, Ontario.

- a series of booklets, such as  
"Effective Meetings", "Community  
Organizations, etc. *(free)*

Community Development Branch,  
Department of the Provincial  
Secretary and Citizenship,  
151 Bloor Street West, Suite 380,  
Toronto 5, Ontario.

- Discussion Leader's Handbook *(free)*
- Conference Planning for Involvements *(free)*
- Resources Available to Citizen and  
Community Groups *(free)*

The Ontario Economic Council,  
950 Yonge Street, 7th floor,  
Toronto, Ontario.

- Immigrant Integration *(free)*
- Ontario Government Services *(\$5.00)*

Canadian Council on Social Development,  
55 Parkdale Avenue,  
Ottawa, Ontario.

- Housing and People — a bi-monthly  
newsletter *(\$2.00 per year)*

#### Social Planning Councils

- most local Councils publish a  
directory of community services  
on an annual basis. For further  
information contact your nearest  
Social Planning Council *(costs vary)*



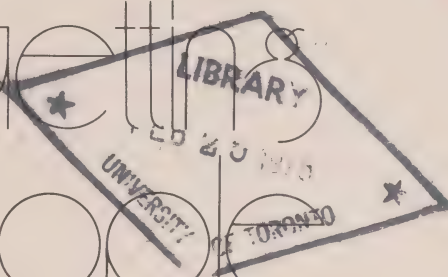






CADAN  
CR 40  
- G 26

Getting  
People  
Together



*Also Available:*

Conference Planning

Discussion Leaders' Handbook

Resources for Community Groups

Directory of Community Groups in Ontario

Public Participation in Planning Policy and Programme

Originally published in 1970

Reprinted 1973, 1975

Available at the Ontario Government Bookstore





Ministry of  
Culture and  
Recreation

1122W  
OC 75596  
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Malcolm Rowan  
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# Getting People Together



TABLE OF CONTENTS

	PAGE
1. INTRODUCTION .....	1
2. GETTING TOGETHER .....	3
The Initial Contact Group .....	4
The Founding Committee .....	5
Building on the Founding Committee .....	5
The Constitution Committee .....	6
Temporary Executive .....	6
Where to Hold Meetings? .....	7
When to Meet? .....	8
Planning The First Public Meeting .....	8
Adjustments Under “Crisis” Conditions .....	12
Decision-Making .....	13
3. STAYING TOGETHER .....	14
What About Money .....	14
Sources of Assistance .....	15
Alternative Sources .....	17
When to Quit .....	17
4. SOME OF THE MORE TECHNICAL QUESTIONS .....	19
Structure or Be Free .....	19
Communications and Publicity .....	21
Involving More People .....	23
Relationships with Other Groups .....	25
Gathering Information .....	26
The Role of the Community Worker .....	27
5. CONCLUSION .....	28
APPENDIX A	
Sample Constitution Clauses .....	29





## 1. INTRODUCTION

This revised booklet, originally written in 1970 by Mr. P. G. Green, has been revised & republished in response to many requests made to the Ministry of Culture and Recreation regarding assistance in the establishment and development of community or neighbourhood groups. The following pages are intended only to serve as a general guide and should not be regarded as the final answer in organizing your group.

The past several years have seen a great increase in the involvement of people in the life of their community. No matter what you see as the reason for forming a group, you are not alone — thousands of Canadians have. Most of them with interests similar to yours will be happy to help or communicate with you. A *Directory of Community Groups in Ontario* has been recently published by the Ministry which will help you locate them.

## 2. GETTING TOGETHER

There is only one simple requirement for starting a group — people must see a need for it.

The initial organization can play a vital role in how the organization or group develops, and how effective it is in meeting its purposes. Some groups form gradually over a period of several weeks, while others are created to meet a special need when time is of the essence.

Groups formed over a longer time usually have the greatest long-term impact on people.

Even when working in a rush, it is wise to know how most groups get off the ground. An outline of how many Ontario groups have begun is therefore followed by some suggestions for adjustments that can be made under 'crisis' conditions.

Some questions should first be answered by anyone thinking about starting a group:—

### (1) WHAT IS IT FOR?

Apart from the overall benefits of involvement in a community, what are likely to be the purposes and objectives around which people will form a group?

### (2) WHAT WILL IT DO?

The initiators of a group should have some ideas or suggestions about what a new group could do to meet a need. The membership must, however, make all the final decisions. The impact of many people working together is so great that the thinking becomes "what WE want" instead of "what THEY want."

### (3) WHO IS LIKELY TO JOIN IT?

Is it to be local neighbourhood group or a geographically wider community of interest? Can it provide incentive for potential members to join?

#### (4) IS A NEW GROUP REALLY NEEDED FOR THIS PURPOSE?

Does one already exist? It is wise to look and ask around before starting a new group. You might end up in competition with one that has exactly the same objectives for the same people. There are times when a new group is necessary, when an old one has stagnated, but you would be very wise to find out whether you might be further ahead to revitalize an existing organization.

It is essential to be thinking clearly about the reasons for a new group, because people will soon be asking questions. Thoughtless answers can mean lost potential members, so to help you, the questions could also be restated another way.

(1) *What* do you want to do?

Why?

(2) *Who* do you want to do it?

Why?

(3) *When* do you want to do it?

Why?

(4) *How* do you want to do it?

Though these questions may seem childishly simple and perhaps even too basic, ask them of yourself and others. You may be surprised at some of the different answers you get from people you thought were all agreed. Then with brief, but clear and understandable answers to these questions ready, you have the beginning of a group.

#### THE INITIAL CONTACT GROUP

When you have sorted things out in your own mind, the next step is to find from four to a dozen other people who share your ideas. In a neighbourhood, this is easy if the concern you feel is widely reflected. Just talk to friends and neighbours. Some may be interested, but reluctant to "get involved." Remind them that no special talents are required. For example, if your concerns relate to children, staff at local schools might help, and parents of some of your own children's friends may share your ideas.

It's then a simple step to arrange an informal meeting at a convenient time and location when you have found the nucleus for a group. A private home is by far the best place for a relaxed, informal atmosphere. Talk over collectively your ideas.

## **THE FOUNDING COMMITTEE**

A 'Founding Committee' is really another name for a steering committee, but one which suggests less formalized structure. The name adequately defines the purpose.

The initial contact group may define itself as the 'Founding Committee' to initiate action, or it may try to arrange an open public meeting to see if additional people can be attracted at this stage.

The job of the Founding Committee is not to make a lot of decisions, but to seek out alternatives, to let people know the group is being formed, and to present firm suggestions about how it should proceed. Depending on the size of the group, the founding committee can, if that amount of formality is desired, also perform the functions of the 'Constitution Committee'. (See section on Constitution Committee below.)

## **BUILDING ON THE FOUNDING COMMITTEE**

Members of the group tend to recommend themselves by their own interest in the early stages, but many groups like to start letting people know they exist. A stampede doesn't often result, but some additional support can be added.

If the group is to serve a small well-defined district, a church or school in the area may be willing to help reproduce a leaflet describing the ambitions of the new group, and perhaps suggesting an informal meeting for anyone interested.

The first meeting a group holds is a very important one.

If an informal meeting is desired, a small room in a central location is best. Arrangements can usually be made for the use of a staff lounge at a school or a small meeting room at a church. Have more available, but don't put out more than about twenty chairs. However optimistic you may feel, it is always better psychologically to have to add additional chairs than to have a few people scattered among a hundred empty seats.

## THE CONSTITUTION COMMITTEE

As mentioned above, the functions of this short-term committee can quite easily be served by the founding (or steering) committee, or by the temporary executive. This is especially so if it is a very small group. However, if your first contact group feels a constitution is needed, and enough people are available and interested, it is far better to get them actively contributing right from the start. Avoid having a small group doing all the work unless no one else is presently available. To maintain their interest, some people might be invited to develop the constitution for the group. (Most groups have some informal statement of purpose or intent, but many others still like a formal constitution.)

The need and relative benefits of having or not having a constitution are discussed in Part. IV. Here, it is enough to suggest that if the group intends to handle any funds it is usually considered to be beneficial to have a constitution that includes directions for control of group moneys.

Some sample clauses for citizen group constitutions are included in an appendix at the back of this booklet.

The constitution committee should try to have proposals for the group constitution ready to present to the founding meeting for approval. Sometimes, changes are voted, additions or deletions are made by the membership, and the committee has to incorporate such changes in the final constitution. Once this job is completed, the constitution committee is disbanded, and its members go on to other activities. The committee can always be revived if there seems to be a need.

## TEMPORARY EXECUTIVE

There are two big reasons why a group's first executive committee should be appointed for a short term only.

In the first place, you will expect your group to grow and may make contact with interested and helpful people after it has started. You may want some of these people on your executive.

Even more important is the fact that, at the outset, people will know very few of those attending the meetings, and even a nodding acquaintance gives little idea as to how capable people may be in a certain role. Some of those elected may also be new to



citizen involvement, and find they would be happier if they didn't have the worry of a leadership role once they try it.

It is suggested, then, that it would be very wise to elect your first executive committee for about a three-month term to start with, then for a nine-month term, and annually thereafter.

Nearly all citizen groups have an "Executive Committee" or at least a group that performs the functions of one, but the name may sound terribly formal to you. If it does, change it to any name acceptable to your members, but make sure everyone knows what is expected of him.

## WHERE TO HOLD MEETINGS?

A neighbourhood or community type of group should try to find a location central to the area it wishes to serve. Many Ontario school boards are beginning to make school facilities available in the evenings without charge to worthwhile community organizations, and your local school authorities or trustees can advise you if this applies to your area.

Some churches are also willing to accommodate you, as long as the day and time you select does not conflict with any of their own meetings. You will find they often have to obtain approval of various boards or committees, so give them plenty of notice.

Many other possible places suggest themselves — libraries, union or legion halls, municipal buildings and so on.

Don't get carried away and book a room for which you have to pay a lot of money. You may find the payment coming from your own pocket. Also, don't book too large a room so those attending become 'lost' in it, or have to shout to be heard. For a small meeting, a lounge is usually better than an auditorium, and a cosy basement better than a huge Sunday School room.

Space is almost always available when you start looking around; in fact you'll probably be quite surprised at how helpful many people are once your group gets going.

A special interest group — for example, a city-wide group forming to work on pollution problems — should try to find a location as central as possible within the city to avoid having

anyone travel too far. Also, keep in mind that some of those who come may not be familiar with the district. If you have a choice, a location on a main road is preferable to a small side street. Try to give some simple directions, and find out ahead of time what the parking situation is like at the time you want to meet.

## **WHEN TO MEET?**

Most groups are best served by holding meetings in the evenings. Some, such as a women's coffee club or the "Take-a-Break" groups, have to meet in the daytime, as may some especially designed for shift workers. In general, however, evenings are best. Young children are in bed, and babysitting is usually available. Working people are also home after supper and may be attracted out for something worthwhile.

A commonly used starting time is 8 p.m., but keep in mind the interests of the people you hope to attract. For example, some may not want to give up an interesting hockey game on TV!

Not so long ago, Tuesdays and Thursdays were always considered good "meeting" nights. However, there are so many activities going on these days that some organizations find Mondays less competitive for people's time. Fridays are bad, being a common shopping night, entertainment night, or people may be off somewhere for a weekend. Weekends are generally disastrous except for occasional special events, but some groups are finding Sunday evenings increasingly acceptable.

## **PLANNING THE FIRST PUBLIC MEETING**

Many new groups have been extremely disappointed when, having finally got to the point of calling their first public meeting, only a handful of friends and relatives show up!

It is no longer enough to reserve space, stick a notice on a lamppost, and wait for everyone to arrive! Your first meeting must have particularly careful planning and publicity. Try to put yourself outside the area of being directly involved, and ask yourself: "Would I go to that meeting?", "Who's holding it?", "What's it for?", "Is it worth paying a babysitter?"

These are some of the questions that you have to answer before they are asked, in your pre-meeting publicity.

A lot may depend on what main issues you are organizing your group around. You can probably count on solid support from neighbours if it's because a developer wants to erect a high-rise apartment in your back yard!

If your 'thing' is to provide children's recreation or after school care, then of course all parents — especially working parents — have reason to be interested, and your local school may like to help with publicity. A group that has the desire to go into several fields of endeavour will likely start in a very small way, and grow more slowly than one with a big immediate issue to face, but that group will often be stronger and longer lasting for the slower growth under sound leadership.

When planning that all-important first meeting, therefore, you will find that most or all of the following points are worth considering:—

- (1) Try to set a *date* about three weeks ahead if you can. This will allow time to work on publicity.
- (2) Call or write your *local newspaper(s)* and *radio station(s)*, advising them about the meeting and why it is being called. Unless you want to avoid the press, invite them to the meeting. (Some groups are adamantly opposed to the presence of reporters, especially if they are to be engaged in some sort of "pressure" action. It takes experience to really decide when the press may be helpful but, as a general rule, they can help with publicity that is necessary to get your group off the ground.)
- (3) *Letters to the 'Editor'* about the main issues you wish to present can arouse interest in these issues before people hear about the meeting.
- (4) If your meeting concerns a local geographical area, *door-to-door newsletters* can help — but don't expect great results from these alone. Teenagers are often a big help with distribution and can do a very responsible job. If time permits, a knock at each door with personal delivery is much better, and gives you an opportunity to answer 'on-the-spot' questions.
- (5) Make sure your leaflet or newsletter contains *point of contact* — address and telephone number, with several names of

people in your group. This may encourage people to contact you, and will assure them that this is a local project started by their neighbours.

- (6) Remind all on your initial contact group, or committee, (and their wives and husbands) to *mention the proposed meeting to friends* and neighbours at every opportunity. Try to get a firm commitment from each contact.
- (7) About two weeks ahead, ask *local ministers* to announce the meeting (and the reason for it) to their congregations.
- (8) Try to arrange for *a well-known guest* to be at your meeting to speak briefly and perhaps answer some questions. It does not have to be a nationally famous figure, but someone known and respected locally or whose name has been in the news about the issue(s) in which you are interested. Some may come to hear this guest who might not otherwise have shown interest.
- (9) Ensure your publicity mentions the *name* of that person, and the reason, if possible, why he or she will attend (i.e. to speak on pollution, etc.).
- (10) Avoid any temptation to pad out the program with someone's home movies of last summer's trip to Vancouver. *A short brisk meeting* that stays on the subject at hand will encourage people to come back. Those who feel they would have been better to stay in front of their TV sets may never come back.
- (11) If you can, try to arrange for coffee and *refreshments* — usually cookies or doughnuts are enough. This will encourage people to stay around after the formal meeting. They will get to know each other, and increase the possibility of adding to your action group.
- (12) *Recognize that not everyone is "action-oriented."* If your group plans a militant or activist program, try to include something for those who, for whatever reason, prefer a more sedate life. This will broaden your membership base, and also improve your chances for later success.
- (13) Select a *chairman* for your first meeting with great care. If the chairman of the steering committee, or founding com-



mittee, has had little experience or still lacks confidence, it may be wise to invite a guest chairman for the evening. Make yourself available to him (her) well before the meeting — at his convenience — so that he understands exactly what you are trying to do. This could be a chairman of another local group, a minister or priest, a member of the Legislature or local municipal politician, or someone from one of the organizations listed under “Sources of Assistance.” Your group chairman or president would introduce the guest chairman to the meeting, and get the feel of how to run future meetings. In some cases, people are coming together to generally talk over their concerns. In this case a chairman might not be needed.

- (14) To start the meeting, either present those who come with a *written background* of why you felt it necessary to call the meeting or explain why it was felt a citizen group was needed.
- (15) Make sure that someone in your group will be prepared to take *notes* (or ‘minutes’).
- (16) Plan a meeting of the group leaders or elected committee as soon as possible after the first meeting to start on the *follow-up*.
- (17) Before *closing* the meeting, make sure everyone knows what has been decided, and what is to happen next. Your chairman can be asked to help by summing up at the close. Always set a date — even if approximate — for a follow-up.
- (18) *Always be guided by what has come out of the meeting*, especially by a vote. It is easy for the organizers to feel they know better than those attending and there is often a temptation to go ahead in their own way regardless. This can only result in no local support, and no group. It may even cause the formation of an opposing organization.
- (19) You may want to have a *committee, or executive*, elected; if so, do it near the end of the meeting as many attending may be strangers. They will want an opportunity to hear different people’s views before voting. **AT THIS MEETING — AND THIS MEETING ONLY — CONCENTRATE ON THE ISSUES FIRST AND THE PEOPLE LATER.** By issues, this includes issues as they affect people, but ever afterwards con-



sider people first. THIS IS THE PARTIAL EXCEPTION TO THE GENERAL RULE.

- (20) Be equipped with pens and sheets of lined paper or a cheap exercise book, and ask those attending to *register with name, address and telephone number*. You can then be sure of getting back to those individuals with any follow-up notices.

## ADJUSTMENTS UNDER “CRISIS” CONDITIONS

A group that is forming to resolve an immediate problem, of whatever kind, has to be able to organize very quickly. It often cannot follow the procedures outlined here simply because time does not permit. A meeting has to be called very quickly, wherever space can be hastily arranged. Notice of meeting will likely be by word of mouth – you hope to get as many as possible to start, and that others will hear or be contacted to join in later. Functions like founding committees, constitutions, and so on can wait until the action is under way to meet the crisis.

Your first meeting will likely be devoted almost entirely to a discussion of what options are available. Don't forget however, that it will still be necessary to provide some background information for some people before they can contribute effectively. (Remember the questions on Page 3 and 4.) Action-oriented resource people will help as long as they are content to remain in an advisory capacity and not try to dictate the action. This is often difficult for someone wholly geared to action.

Some 'crisis' groups get into arguments about who is supposed to be speaking on their behalf. It is wise to decide early on, who is to handle press releases, who will try to get the issue raised on TV or radio news if that applies, and who is to contact the necessary authorities (Councils, Governments, etc.).

Over enthusiastic members of the group can often be impetuous and go ahead on their own to the detriment of the group.

Research material can be expensive, and almost impossible for a group to obtain on short notice. Some bodies, like social planning councils, have archives full of research material on a variety of subjects, and some of these may help. Most groups, however, stay on “PEOPLE” problems rather than research. If the issue is big enough, others with more funds and staff at their disposal will pick up on the research. Make sure they know of your group, and

that the group has an opportunity to feed information into the research body. This will increase the likelihood of the research findings supporting your stand.

Having formed a group to meet a need, you will have to decide whether to meet this one need only, or to continue (see on 'When to Quit'). This will also help you decide how much structure the group requires.

Handling an immediate issue is really a subject in itself, and will not be covered in greater detail here. Use your own discretion about obtaining help from the 'Sources of assistance' list.

## **DECISION-MAKING**

Volumes have been written about the best method of decision-making. Some people feel that decisions should be made at the top by the chairman or executive committee. Others say that the members make the decisions and that the executive carry them out. There are also many variations between these choices.

The type of decision-making you will have will depend upon your members and the objectives of the group. So, keep the organization flexible until you can see what method best helps the group meet its objective.

### 3. STAYING TOGETHER

This section assumes that the group is well off the ground, and instead of being in the founding stages, it must turn its attention to the art of staying together.

#### WHAT ABOUT MONEY?

A group that is being formed solely for discussion purposes can operate very efficiently on very little money. Coffee and snacks may be provided at meetings, but dimes or quarters from those present can purchase supplies for the next get-together.

However, this is an exception — most groups need *some* money. At the beginning their estimates of their needs are often greatly exaggerated but, as the group gains knowledge and experience, it finds many things available free for the asking. This applies especially to local community association.

The fact still remains that many multi-purpose groups, and some single-purpose groups, need money to get off the ground. If they don't find a way to raise it, there's a good chance the group won't continue for long — or if it does, it won't be as effective as it might be.

A word of caution, then. Although money may seem all-important to you in your early plans (and it may be that you are right), it is a question which you would be wise to talk over thoroughly amongst yourselves, and seek advice and opinions from others.

If you decide your group does need money, you then have to decide how to raise it.

Membership fees can help you get started, but the amount raised is not generally enough to do very much. Also, if the membership fee is set too high in order to raise money, people may balk at joining an unknown organization that charges a substantial fee. A person may risk a dollar or two, but often won't chance five dollars, at least until the group has proved itself.

Some groups have dispensed with fees altogether. All residents of a stated area are automatically entitled to the benefits of mem-

bership, perhaps by simply signing a statement of interest in the group. This can really generate interest when people can find out about a group without risking any money, but it doesn't help the group treasury.

Fortunately, there are increasing sources of funds available to citizen organizations. The Ontario Government has recognized the need for some funding to help groups get started, and is often prepared to help a group. Depending on your program plans, other organizations or levels of government may be prepared to help. There are some private foundations that take an interest, especially in some kind of innovative service, and some Federal Government departments will assist a project.

Most bodies, private or government, have certain criteria your group must meet in order to receive a grant. This is only to be expected as they are handling either public or trust funds.

You may also locate your own source of funds. The only caution is to see that there are no strings attached that could inhibit your group in what it wants to achieve.

The Ministry of Culture and Recreation publishes a booklet which lists a variety of resources available to community groups; not only financial assistance but also consultative and staff resources, printed and audio-visual aids, speakers and other types of information useful to groups and individuals concerned about making their community a better place to live. This book is available from the Multicultural Development Branch of the Ministry at Queen's Park, and in the Ontario Government Bookstore, 880 Bay Street, Toronto.

In addition, there is a series of booklets available from the Ministry entitled "Notes for Community Leaders" with titles such as: Effective Meetings, Speaking in Public, Leaders and Members, Publicity and Public Relations, and Community Organizations.

## **SOURCES OF ASSISTANCE** (and what to expect from each)

Several references have been made to the fact that help IS available to you on request.

The sources vary from one district to another, but one or more of the following are usually available to you at no charge:

Most ministries of the ONTARIO GOVERNMENT employ staff persons who will assist you on request. These consultants may be especially helpful in providing basic information, directing the group to various sources of assistance, and so on. An amazing variety of types of resources are available free to individuals and groups. All you have to do is ask!

Many *SOCIAL PLANNING COUNCILS* around the Province employ some first-rate people who will be glad to help you if they can. These organizations also have "volunteer" arms, which are like any other citizen organization. However, the volunteers come from all areas and backgrounds, and *may* not be conversant with the citizen-group scene in any particular locality. Staff hours are generally nine to five, but we have yet to hear of a staff person refusing to help a group in an evening if asked.

There are, of course, many *SOCIAL AGENCIES* such as Information Centres and Volunteer Bureaux which provide a variety of services to the community. They may be able to assist you from their general knowledge, or put you in touch with someone more knowledgeable than themselves.

Smaller communities that do not have social planning councils or similar organizations sometimes have *UNITED COMMUNITY SERVICES*, and some employ staff in functions similar to the planning councils in larger centres.

Another valuable source of help is through *FEDERATED OR UMBRELLA CITIZENS' GROUPS*. These are, of course, all volunteers — people just like you who have been through the mill and know where "things are at". They may offer advice and assistance from their own experience and will usually recognize the problems you are facing.

Finally, do not overlook the possibility of help from a group a few blocks away from you. It is not always easy to identify a group, or to locate its leaders — usually it's a question of asking around. Such a group, close to your own location, probably shares some of the same problems and will often be glad to help. In any event, its members will appreciate the knowledge that you have started a group, and what you hope to do.



## ALTERNATIVE SOURCES

Many churches and ministers will help; they often have plenty of organizational experiences. The same applies to local elected representatives and municipal officials who could provide groups with information on the appropriate department to contact for maps, studies or reports.

An additional community resource is the community college or university. Often groups will find faculty persons interested in their areas of concern and willing to provide information or professional assistance of some nature. In this way resources ranging from expertise to volunteer researchers and meeting space could be made available.

Some people may present themselves as “Community Workers” but have little or no experience or training. Some of these undoubtedly well-intentioned people can do your group more harm than good, so be sure to check out the background if you consider approaching such a person, or are approached by one. Make sure they know what they are talking about.

## WHEN TO QUIT

Many groups will face the question, “Should we quit or carry on?” at some time in their existence — some face it quite frequently. Many groups form, in fact, around one issue only, and many have no need to continue after that.

Keep firmly in mind that there is no reflection on a group or its members if they decide the group no longer serves a purpose. It may be much better for active people involved in their community to move on to other challenges more deserving of their attention.

If the group has dwindled in numbers and enthusiasm to the point where it can no longer function, it is better to call a meeting of those still interested, and suggest a resolution to “kill” the organization. Either this will happen, or the ensuing discussion might suggest new endeavours that might be undertaken to revitalize the group.

Any money left on hand could be passed, if members agree, to another active organization working for an acceptable cause, given to a charity or medical research fund acceptable to your members, or deposited in a bank until some future issue requires the forma-

tion of a new group. If this is done, make sure all your group (and the bank, of course) know to whom the money could be paid and under what circumstances. If the amount is substantial, legal help might enable you to set up a trusteeship.

Current thinking suggests this is better than the old way some groups operated in the past — meeting an issue, then going into ‘limbo’ for a few years until something else required attention. When that happens, no one knows for sure if the organization still exists, and any new or potential group workers in a community are reluctant to start up a new group and perhaps tread on a lot of toes. Consequently, many opportunities for effective work are missed while everyone waits for someone else to “do something.”

Self-evaluation by a group should be a continuing thing, and when that evaluation says it's time to quit, don't fight it.

## 4. SOME OF THE MORE TECHNICAL QUESTIONS

The pages you have read so far should give a beginner some fair idea about how to form a group, and where to obtain help when it is wanted.

In the early days of your group, other questions may be raised and decisions may be faced that involve more than simply calling a group together and setting up a few meetings — questions about such technical sounding subject like “communications,” “structure,” “group relationships” and so on.

This last section will attempt to give you some ideas from the volunteer's point of view. It won't answer every question that arises, but will give some background information to help you find your own answers when the need arises.

### STRUCTURE OR BE FREE . . .

Some community groups seem to have been organized by the sort of people who are sticklers for every detail. They like to see a group's constitution or by-laws spell out everything to the maximum degree.

This is what is called a highly structured group — when everything is laid out in detail in an organization's rules and regulations. A perfect example might be your own Municipal Government, with all its committees, departments, and books full of by-laws necessary for it to function effectively. This is structure far in excess of the needs of a community group.

Most of us are reasonably familiar with this kind of structure, from observation if not experience, and even when we are organizing to meet one of these structured bodies, we tend to adopt the same kind of structure ourselves. It's often the only way we know.

On the other hand, a group might meet up with a recent university graduate who says, “Structure? What do you need structure for?” and then proceeds to explain how a group can dispense with tools like constitutions, executive officers, committees, by-laws, and so on.

“You don’t need a chairman or president,” he may say — “simply rotate the duties among your membership.”

There is enough truth in these arguments to make them sound believable, and it is admitted that this unstructured organization will be suitable for some groups: not only a debating club, but perhaps a council of local organizations sharing information, even if the local organizations are really committees of a handful of people. Each group could supply a chairman in rotation, and make its own notes of items of interest. Open forum groups, which may discuss issues but pass no resolutions and take no action, are another example.

For the majority of citizen groups — especially those handling money or engaging in ‘action’ of some kind, the totally unstructured set-up can be highly dangerous. It provides no restriction on who is to handle the group’s funds, and how; it makes it even more difficult to establish control over highly enthusiastic members who insist on going their own way regardless of group opinion. It also fails to provide a formalized basis for settling disputes among members.

It might also be added that the use of money by a group is one of the most frequent sources of discontent amongst members of that group.

One final hazard of the unstructured group is that it is more open to the smooth-talking individual who sees the group as a vehicle to be used for some hidden purpose — good or bad. When this happens, it is not until most of the original membership has left that someone asks, “What went wrong?”

Too much structure, on the other hand, can inhibit the group in a different way. If the purpose of the organization is detailed in the constitution as, “To organize and present objections to there-zoning of . . . . area.” then the group has given itself no mandate for future work on problems connected with day care in the area, youth activities, local pollution, or anything else.

The group could work on the same original project, and leave the future much more flexible if the constitution were to state instead:

“The purpose of . . . organization is to bring the greatest possible benefit to area residents in the fields of health, recreation, general education and social welfare.”

This sort of wording allows the group to do anything reasonable and still be free to face some future issue or crisis.

Many groups seem to have found the right balance between too much structure, and none at all; a new group should try to leave some provision for changes in its constitution at fairly frequent intervals as it grows in experience.

It is suggested that new groups, desiring some structure, limit the formality to an outline of the purpose of the group, control of money, duties and terms of its leaders, and future dissolution. It is always easier to add more when the group needs it, than it is to remove structure once it has been created.

## COMMUNICATIONS AND PUBLICITY

Most groups need publicity at some time, either to reach out to potential new members, to advise the community at large about concerns or activities of the group, or to gain support around an issue.

At the same time, several groups have felt that the press has ‘used’ them, or their activities, only for sensationalism. Thus they become very reluctant to contact the media.

Consequently it may be wise to take note of how your local media handles citizen group news. Don’t forget that citizen groups are new to you, and may be new to the media people as well – they may simply not understand what you are doing or what you are trying to achieve.

It does seem reasonable to comment that the press will often give much more coverage to a sit-in or demonstration than it will to the constructive and on-going activities of most groups that may be rather less sensational, although equally or perhaps more worthwhile.

When your group wishes to advise the news media about a matter, the usual method is by a “Press release.”



This is a written statement by the group about the subject, and should advise the editor “WHO-WHAT-WHY-WHEN-WHERE.” It should also include the name and address of the sending group, and a contact person and telephone number for use if more information is required by the paper.

The press release should always be double-spaced, typewritten one side of a page only, with a wide margin on both sides. Try to use only one page if possible, and give the editor a clear indication when he has reached the end of the item. This is traditionally done by typing —30— two or three lines below the final line. Miss out on any of these suggestions, and you increase the risk that your press release will end up in the wastebasket.

Keep in your own mind, when sending a press release, that what seems to you to be a big story may not be so to a busy news editor. If you have the opportunity for a personal contact, take the release to the paper(s) in person.

Radio, and sometimes even TV should not be overlooked as useful media, either for press releases or public service announcements about forthcoming public meetings. Many stations are happy to co-operate if your group gives them fair notice.

Many groups remember the need for communication, or publicity, outside their membership or area, but sometimes overlook the even more important need to communicate with members and potential members of the group.

There are various ways to do this — one of the most effective is the periodic group newsletter. This is especially useful to a neighbourhood, community, or cultural group engaged in many different activities.

Internal communications can be seen as an important way of advertising. It's often not enough to put a message across only once — it should be done several times (if possible) to reach everyone. Each member of a group engaged in many functions, may be familiar with only a few of them.

Seek out your own method of communicating — newsletters, a local news column in the weekly press, public meetings, word of mouth whenever possible, perhaps a system of area representatives each serving one block or one floor of an apartment building.

Your area representatives can also help with the distribution of notices or newsletter, and carry feed-back as well. This is most important.

Effective communications must be two-way communications. It's not enough for an executive committee to advise the membership about all the good work it is doing. It must have the ability to hear what people are saying in the area or membership, and it must be able to respond.

Good two-way communications will help to hold the group together, make it a viable and effective organization, and promote the ideal of frequent self-evaluation.

## INVOLVING MORE PEOPLE

Think about some of the more critical comments you may have heard from some people involved in citizen groups:

“The apathy around here is appalling”

“Our committee has to do everything”

“They all want the benefits, but no-one wants to help”

“We had several meetings, but hardly anyone came”

“We haven't had elections because no-one wants to run for office”

“People only come out if it's a big issue”

Any of these sound familiar? Are they valid complaints?

Let's look at some realities!

There is apathy in many areas, but not as much as some people think. Many individuals are concerned, but have little knowledge to work from and are scared they might make themselves look silly. Some also fear retribution from some source or other. Many have grown up in an atmosphere of ‘keep cool – don't get involved’ or ‘the experts know best.’ These people need encouragement to participate and state their opinions.

A committee that ‘has to do everything’ often does so because it WANTS to do everything. Committee members feel a sense of their own importance, and feel they can do a better job anyway.

Not so. People very seldom volunteer for a job, but some would love to be asked!

No-one wants to help? One can't expect a mother of four or five young children to devote three evenings a week to supervising a drop-in centre. Nor can a man who works shift commit himself for regular attendance at anything, but MOST people are willing to take a share within their own capability. The more people your group has working, the less each individual has to do and the stronger the group becomes.

If people don't come to meetings, it may be because they didn't know about it, or didn't get enough notice to make suitable baby-sitting arrangements, had a prior commitment, or perhaps the topic under discussion was not of sufficient interest. Make sure your organization's meetings are interesting, and give everyone there a chance to participate. Everyone likes to believe his own opinions and views are important, and in a community group, they *are* important.

When nobody will run for office in an organization, it may be because those in office have taken too much on themselves and no one person will take it all over; it may be because they feel enmity might be caused with those gaining personal satisfaction from holding the office; it may also be **BECAUSE NO ONE EVER ASKED**, personally and sincerely!

People will come out for a big issue, because they recognize how it will affect them, and their lives or families. You don't get hundreds at any meeting, but careful publicity might point out how important a subject really is when people hadn't given it much thought before. An example might be the issue of pollution, almost unheard of a few years ago. This goes to show how very important your pre-meeting publicity is.

No one has yet found the whole answer to getting people involved, but a well-run group who can sincerely offer an invitation and a purpose will have the most success. Just remember (it cannot be over-emphasized) – we all like to feel that we count for something and that our personal views are important. When group leaders recognize this, they are on the way to having a well-supported group.

One word of warning. Don't get too carried away!

Some complaints have been heard about a group executive committee that tries to hand off everything, refusing to do even its own job. They, too, might wonder why more people don't get involved!

## RELATIONSHIPS WITH OTHER GROUPS

As your group gets itself organized, it will undoubtedly run into difficulties that seem, at first sight, insurmountable. As suggested in earlier sections, quite often a group that has been going longer can help.

Even beyond that, while many of the projects your group work on will be strictly local projects, there will also be times when you want to work on something that affects a borough, a whole city, a province, or even all Canada! For example, your group might want to start a day care centre, but isn't day care a national, or at the very least, a provincial problem? Many others must support your concerns. Your group might be organizing around a proposed zoning change, but won't that change also affect other communities around you? Pollution, while sometimes local in nature, is by no means a local problem only; neither is education, adult or children's.

You will therefore need to know who has groups going around you in the same general area, the same city, province, and so on. You may find several groups all sharing similar concerns, and collective action with them can not only save your members time and duplicated effort, but it may be also very much more effective if many groups co-operate.

Your group may be very well advised to affiliate with the 'umbrella' group of its choice — whichever seems closest to meeting your need. When doing so, make sure that your group remains independent and autonomous (self-governing), and that it will be consulted fully before any decisions are made in its name. Most umbrella organizations are quite careful about this, but it pays to be sure. Check to see what (if anything) is required of your group, and what your group is offered.

Just as within your own group, member organizations within an umbrella body will receive as much as they put into it.

Having made your choice, select your representatives, and be sure to make provision at your own meetings for them to report



back to you about what is happening elsewhere. It makes no sense to be gathering information if no one in the group gets to hear it.

Many organizations don't realize the fact, especially at the early stages of their development, but many similar problems face folk festival groups, cultural groups, welfare rights groups and businessmen's associations, arts and crafts groups, food co-operatives drop-in centres and community school groups. When they all get together, citizen involvement will be a powerful tool indeed.

When you have gathered available information about the possible umbrella organizations with which your group might affiliate, it is wise to put the matter before your full membership rather than treat it as an executive decision only. Inter-group co-operation requires, at times, more than just a present committee, and potential future leaders should know what is going on. Make your recommendations, but, as in all things, allow the group to make the final decision knowing all relevant facts.

## GATHERING INFORMATION

Part of your relationship with other groups will be an in-flow of information useful to your group, and an awareness of "know-how" that might otherwise take months to develop. Depending on your special interests, your sources of information need not stop there.

A single-purpose organization can usually identify sources of information about its special interest simply by reading and listening.

A group formed for many different purposes has to go much further afield, and into a much wider range of subjects.

Affiliation of at least one member of the group to other organizations can result in many leads to information when needed, or can add sources and contacts which are always good to have.

Futhermore, as many of your group as possible should get to know your local school trustee(s), alderman(men), provincial and federal members of parliament, school principal(s), local church clergy, and the staff of local newspapers. The local elected representatives are available and willing to help you with information about resources available and any concerns you may have.



Leaders, at least, should become familiar with both government and private services available in the community:— libraries, information centres, cultural, recreational, day care, emergency home-help services, services for pensioners, etc. Sooner or later, someone in your group will need such information.

THE WHOLE PROCESS OF COLLECTING INFORMATION USEFUL TO YOUR GROUP SHOULD NEVER CEASE.

## THE ROLE OF THE COMMUNITY WORKER

When you feel you need professional assistance, there are several 'consultant' services available to your group without charge. Generally speaking, these consultants, who will meet with you at your request on a matter of specific concern to you, are dedicated people on whom you can rely.

"Community Development" is a popular phase, and all kinds and types of people are presenting themselves as 'community workers.' Some have neither field training — that is actually being involved within a group — nor academic training to qualify them for the job. Such people MAY do your group more harm than good. The biggest fear groups have is the so-called community worker who only wants to use the group for his or her own purpose.

Fortunately, these are pretty rare, but there is no central registry or source of information about such people to help you to identify which kind any individual may be. It is suggested that, if you have doubts, you should check with either a known or recommended consultant, and find out where, when, and with what group(s) the prospective community worker has been involved. You will then be able to learn more even if from another city.

In the meantime (and the same applies to ANY community worker) you must make absolutely sure that he or she works under the direction of your group, and does the work your group wants him to do. He (or she, of course) must report back to your group, not to somewhere else giving you no control. Most good community workers DO work this way, and will appreciate you 'laying it on the line.' That's just the way they would want it to be.

## 5. CONCLUSION

This booklet cannot attempt to tell you everything about citizen and community groups.

It is hoped that you have received from it some basic ideas with which you can get started. By participating in a citizen group you are taking part in our democratic society in a meaningful way. The introduction said you would run into frustrations — and you will, but they are outweighed by many rewarding experiences.

“Citizenship” will be to you, and your group, something more than an expression or a piece of paper; whatever the nature of your group, each member may rightfully feel that his community, city, province, and country have received benefit from every effort — no matter how small.

## APPENDIX "A"

### Sample Constitution Clauses

The following suggestions have been put, as far as possible, into everyday language. They are adequate for most unincorporated groups. If your group plans to incorporate, a legal advisor should be consulted.

Start by stating the name of the organization, and who may join:

The name of the organization shall be the Harvest Heights Community Association, and it shall be comprised of such persons who reside in the Harvest Heights area and who have paid the required membership fee.

Then give the purpose of the group:

The Association shall be operated in a manner so as to bring the greatest possible benefit to area residents in the fields of health, recreation, general education, and social welfare.

The Association shall try to encourage the idea of citizen participation in community affairs.

The Association shall be a vehicle for collective action on matters of concern to its members.

If the group is to have officers (or executives), states how many, their titles, and how often they should be elected:

Annually, during the months of . . . . or . . . ., or at the first opportunity thereafter, the following officers shall be elected by the membership: Chairman, two vice-chairmen, secretary and treasurer. These five officers shall form the executive committee of the Association.

State what the membership fee is to be:

There shall be a membership fee of one dollar per family per calendar year, payable in advance.

and then, who is to control Association money:

All funds belonging or entrusted to the Association shall be under the control of the Treasurer, who will present a statement of accounts to the membership (quarterly annually). All funds shall be deposited in a financial institution which is a member of the Canada Deposit Insurance Corporation, and the signatures of the Treasurer and any one other officer shall be required to withdraw funds.

You may then wish to restrict spending large sums:

All expenditures over (fifty dollars) shall be submitted to the general membership for prior approval.

Many groups like to include a clear statement about affiliations:

The Association may in no way be connected with, or affiliated with any single political party, religious institution or commercial enterprise. It may establish desired relationships with other citizen or community organizations that have no partisan political, religious or commercial affiliation, provided that no controls are imposed on the Association.

A group should always specify how future additions or amendments may be made to its constitution:

This constitution may be amended by simple majority vote at any Annual General Meeting.

And the final point, to allow for dissolution when the group is no longer functioning:

The Executive Committee may, at its discretion dissolve the Association if its members believe it no longer serves any purpose, with any funds left on hand (state disposal).

Other items could of course be included — these are basics providing minimum structure. If you wish more, ask some other groups for copies of their constitution or by-laws for further ideas.













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# Getting People Together





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# Getting People Together

by P.G.Green



Ontario

Community Development Branch

Ministry of Community and Social Services

Hon. Rene Brunelle  
Minister

T. M. Eberlee  
Deputy Minister

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# GETTING PEOPLE TOGETHER

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	PAGE
PART ONE – INTRODUCTION . . . . .	1
PART TWO – GETTING TOGETHER . . . . .	3
The Initial Contact Group . . . . .	4
The Founding Committee . . . . .	5
Building on the Founding Committee . . . . .	5
The Constitution Committee . . . . .	6
Temporary Executive . . . . .	6
Where Should We Hold Meetings? . . . . .	7
When Should We Meet? . . . . .	8
Planning Your First Public Meeting . . . . .	8
Adjustments Under “Crisis” Conditions . . . . .	12
PART THREE – STAYING TOGETHER . . . . .	14
Sources of Assistance . . . . .	16
Alternative Sources . . . . .	17
When to Quit . . . . .	18
PART FOUR – SOME OF THE MORE TECHNICAL QUESTIONS	20
Structure or Be Free . . . . .	20
Communications and Publicity . . . . .	22
Involving More People . . . . .	24
Relationships with Other Groups . . . . .	26
Gathering Information . . . . .	27
The Role of the Community Worker . . . . .	28
Conclusion . . . . .	29
APPENDIX A – Sample Clauses or Articles for a Citizen . . . . .	
Group Constitution . . . . .	30
APPENDIX B – Bibliography . . . . .	32

## **PART ONE**

### **INTRODUCTION**

#### **You Are Not Alone – It Has Been Done Before!**

This booklet has been written in response to many requests made to the Community Development Branch regarding assistance in the establishment of community or neighbourhood groups. The following pages are intended only to serve as a general guide and should not be regarded as the final answer in organizing your group.

The past several years have seen a great increase in the involvement of people in the life of their communities. No matter what you see as the reason for forming a group, you are not alone – thousands of Canadians have gone along the same route. Most of them with interests similar to yours will be happy to help or communicate with you.



*Prodigious actions may as well be done  
By weaver's issue, as by prince's son*

Dryden, Aboalom and Achitophel  
Part i, 1.638

*There is an idea abroad among moral people  
that they should make their neighbours good.  
One person I have to make good: myself. But  
my duty to my neighbour is much more  
nearly expressed by saying that I have to  
make him happy – if I may.*

R. L. Stevenson, A Christmas  
Sermon

*Every man's neighbour is his looking glass*

James Howell, Proverbs

## PART TWO

### GETTING TOGETHER

There is only one simple requirement for starting a citizen group — people must see a need for it.

The initial organization can play a vital role in how the organization or group develops, and how effective it is in meeting its purposes. Some groups form gradually over a period of several weeks, while others are created to meet a 'crisis' issue when time is of the essence.

The groups formed over a longer time usually have the greatest long-term impact on people.

Even when working in a rush, it is wise to know how most groups get off the ground. An outline of how many Ontario groups have begun is therefore followed by some suggestions for adjustments that can be made under 'crisis' conditions.

Some questions should first be answered by anyone thinking about starting a group:—

**(1) WHAT IS IT FOR?**

Apart from the overall benefits of involvement in a community, what are likely to be the purposes and objectives around which people will form a group?

**(2) WHAT WILL IT DO?**

The initiators of a group should have some ideas or suggestions about what a new group could do to meet a need. The membership must, however, make all the final decisions. The impact of many people working together is so great that the thinking becomes "what WE want" instead of "what THEY want."

**(3) WHO IS LIKELY TO JOIN IT?**

Is it to be local neighbourhood group or a geographically wider community of interest? Can it provide incentive for potential members to join?

**(4) IS A NEW GROUP REALLY NEEDED FOR THIS PURPOSE?**

Does one already exist? It is wise to look and ask around before starting a new group. You might end up in competition with one that has exactly the same objectives for the same people. There are times when a new group is necessary, when an old one has stagnated, but you would be very wise to first seek out expert opinion (see "Sources of Assistance," p. 16) as to whether you might be further ahead to revitalize an existing organization.

It is essential to be thinking clearly about the reasons for a new group, because people will soon be asking questions. Thoughtless answers can mean lost potential members, so to help you, the questions could also be restated another way.

(1) *What* do you want to do?

Why?

(2) *Who* do you want to do it?

Why?

(3) *When* do you want to do it?

Why?

(4) *How* do you want to do it?

Though these questions may seem childishly simple and perhaps even too basic, try them on yourself and others. You may be surprised at some of the different answers you get from people you thought were all agreed. Then with brief, but clear and understandable answers to these questions ready, you have the beginning of a group.

### **THE INITIAL CONTACT GROUP**

When you have sorted things out in your own mind, the next step is to find from four to a dozen other people who share your ideas. In a neighbourhood, this is easy if the concern you feel is widely reflected. Just talk to friends and neighbours. Some may be interested, but reluctant to "get involved." Remind them that no special talents are required. For example, your concerns may relate to children, staff at local schools might help, and parents of some of your own children's friends may share your ideas.

It's then a simple step to arrange an informal meeting at a convenient time and location when you have found the nucleus for a group. A private home is by far the best place for a relaxed, informal atmosphere. Talk over collectively your mutual ideas.

## THE FOUNDING COMMITTEE

A 'Founding Committee' is really another name for a steering committee, but one which suggests less formalized structure. The name adequately defines the purpose.

The initial contact group may define itself as the 'Founding Committee' to initiate action, or it may try to arrange an open public meeting to see if additional people can be attracted at this stage.

The job of the Founding Committee is not to make a lot of decisions, but to seek out alternatives, to let people know the group is being formed, and to present firm suggestions about how it should proceed. Depending on the size of the group, the founding committee can, if that amount of formality is desired, also perform the functions of the 'Constitution Committee'. (See section on Constitution Committee below.)

## BUILDING ON THE FOUNDING COMMITTEE

Members of the group tend to recommend themselves by their own interest in the early stages, but many groups like to start letting people know they exist. A stampede doesn't often result, but some additional support can be added.

If the group is to be a community, ratepayer, or tenant type, serving a small well defined district, a church or school in the area may be willing to help reproduce a leaflet describing the ambitions of the new group, and perhaps suggesting an informal meeting for anyone interested.

THE FIRST MEETING A GROUP HOLDS IS A VERY IMPORTANT ONE. (A separate section will give several suggestions.) If an informal meeting is desired, a smallish room in a central location is best. Arrangements can usually be made for the use of a staff lounge at a school or a small meeting room at a church. Have more available, but don't put out more than about twenty chairs. However optimistic you may feel, it is always better psychologically to have to add additional chairs than to have a few people scattered among a hundred empty seats.

## THE CONSTITUTION COMMITTEE

As mentioned above, the functions of this short-term committee can quite easily be served by the founding (or steering) committee, or by the temporary executive. This is especially so if it is a very small group. However, if your first contact group feels a constitution is needed, and enough people are available and interested, it is far better to get them actively contributing right from the start. Avoid having a small group doing all the work unless no one else is presently available. To maintain their interest, some people might be invited to develop the constitution for the group. (Most groups have some informal statement of purpose or intent, but many others still like a formal constitution).

The need and relative benefits of having or not having a constitution are discussed in Part IV. Here, it is enough to suggest that if the group intends to handle any funds it is usually considered to be beneficial to have a constitution that includes directions for control of group moneys.

Some sample clauses for citizen group constitutions are included in an appendix at the back of this booklet.

The constitution committee should try to have proposals for the group constitution ready to present to the founding meeting for approval. Sometimes, changes are voted or additions or deletions made by the membership, and the committee has to incorporate such changes in the final constitution. Once this job is completed, the constitution committee is disbanded, and its members go on to other activities. The committee can always be revived if there seems to be a need.

## TEMPORARY EXECUTIVE

There are two big reasons why a group's first executive committee should be appointed for a short term only.

In the first place, you will expect your group to grow and may make contact with interested and helpful people after it has started. You may want some of these people on your executive.

Even more important is the fact that, at the outset, people will know very few of those attending the meetings, and even a nodding acquaintance gives little idea as to how capable people may be in a certain role. Some of those elected may also be new to



citizen involvement, and find they would be happier if they didn't have the worry of a leadership role once they try it.

It is suggested, then, that it would be very wise to elect your first executive committee for about a three-month term to start with, then for a nine-month term, and annually thereafter.

NEARLY ALL CITIZEN GROUPS HAVE AN "EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE" OR AT LEAST A GROUP THAT PERFORMS THE FUNCTIONS OF ONE, BUT THE NAME MAY SOUND TERRIBLY FORMAL TO YOU. IF IT DOES, CHANGE IT TO ANY NAME ACCEPTABLE TO YOUR MEMBERS, BUT MAKE SURE EVERYONE KNOWS WHAT IS EXPECTED OF HIM.

### WHERE SHOULD WE HOLD MEETINGS?

A neighbourhood or community type of group should try to find a location central to the area it wishes to serve. Many Ontario school boards are beginning to make school facilities available in the evenings without charge to worthwhile community organizations, and your local school authorities or trustees can advise you if this applies to your area.

Some churches are also willing to accommodate you, as long as the day and time you select does not conflict with any of their own meetings. You will find they often have to obtain approval of various boards or committees, so give them plenty of notice.

Many other possible places suggest themselves — libraries, union or legion halls, municipal buildings and so on.

Don't get carried away and book a room for which you have to pay a lot of money. You may find the payment coming from your own pocket. Also, don't book too large a room so those attending become 'lost' in it, or have to shout to be heard. For a small meeting, a lounge is usually better than an auditorium, and a cosy basement better than a huge Sunday School room.

Space is almost always available when you start looking around — in fact you'll probably be quite surprised at how helpful many people are once your group gets going.

A special interest group — for example, a city-wide group forming to work on pollution problems — should try to find a

location as central as possible within the city to avoid having anyone travel too far. Also, keep in mind that some of those who come may not be familiar with the district. If you have a choice, a location on a main road is preferable to a small side street. Try to give some simple directions, and find out ahead of time what the parking situation is like at the time you want to meet.

## **WHEN SHOULD WE MEET?**

Most groups are best served by holding meetings in the evenings. Some, such as a women's coffee club or the "Take-a-Break" groups, have to meet in the daytime as may some especially designed for shift workers. In general, however, evenings are best. Young children are in bed, and babysitting is usually available. Working people are also home after supper and may be attracted out for something worthwhile.

8 P.M. is a commonly used starting time, but keep in mind the interests of the people you hope to attract. Few men would want to give up an interesting hockey game on TV for example!

Not so long ago, Tuesdays and Thursdays were always considered good "meeting" nights. However, there are so many activities going on these days that some organizations find Mondays less competitive for people's time. Fridays are bad, being a common shopping night, entertainment night, or people may be off somewhere for a weekend. Weekends are generally disastrous except for occasional special events, but some groups are finding Sunday evenings increasingly acceptable.

## **PLANNING YOUR FIRST PUBLIC MEETING**

Many new groups have been extremely disappointed when, having finally got to the point of calling their first public meeting, only a handful of friends and relatives show up!

It is no longer enough to reserve space, stick a notice on a lamppost, and wait for everyone to arrive! Your first meeting must have particularly careful planning and publicity. Try to put yourself outside the area of being directly involved, and ask yourself, "Would I go to that meeting?" "Who's holding it?" "What's it for?" "Is it worth paying a babysitter?"

These are some of the questions that you have to answer before they are asked, in your pre-meeting publicity.

A lot may depend on what main issues you are organizing your group around. You can probably count on solid support from neighbours if it's because a developer wants to erect a high-rise apartment in your back yard!

If your 'thing' is to be to provide children's recreation or after school care, then of course all parents — especially working parents — have reason to be interested, and your local school may like to help with publicity. A group that has the desire to go into several fields of endeavour will likely start in a very small way, and grow more slowly than one with a big immediate issue to face, but that group will often be stronger and longer lasting for the slower growth under sound leadership.

When planning that all-important first meeting, therefore, you will find that most or all of the following points are worth considering:—

- (1) Try to set a *date* about three weeks ahead if you can. This will allow time to work on publicity.
- (2) Call or write your *local newspaper(s)* and *radio station(s)*, advising them about the meeting and why it is being called. Unless you want to avoid the press, invite them to the meeting. (Some groups are adamantly opposed to the presence of reporters, especially if they are to be engaged in some sort of "pressure" action. It takes experience to really decide when the press may be helpful but, as a general rule, they can help with publicity that is necessary to get your group off the ground.)
- (3) *Letters to the 'Editor'* about the main issues you wish to present can arouse interest in these issues before people hear about the meeting.
- (4) If your meeting concerns a local geographical area, *door-to-door newsletters* can help — but don't expect great results from these alone. Teenagers are often a big help with distribution and can do a very responsible job. If time permits, a knock at each door with personal delivery is much better, and gives you an opportunity to answer 'on-the-spot' questions.
- (5) Make sure your leaflet or newsletter contains a *point of contact* — address and telephone number, with several names of

people in your group. This may encourage people to contact you, and will assure them that this is a local project started by their neighbours.

- (6) Remind all on your initial contact group, or committee, (and their wives and husbands) to *mention the proposed meeting to friends* and neighbours at every opportunity. Try to get a firm commitment from each contact.
- (7) About two weeks ahead, ask *local ministers* to announce the meeting (and the reason for it) to their congregations.
- (8) Try to arrange for a *well-known guest* to be at your meeting to speak briefly and perhaps answer some questions. It does not have to be a nationally famous figure, but someone known and respected locally or whose name has been in the news about the issue(s) in which you are interested. Some may come to hear this guest who might not otherwise have shown interest.
- (9) Ensure your publicity mentions the *name* of that person, and the reason, if possible, why he or she will attend (i.e. to speak on pollution, etc.).
- (10) Avoid any temptation to pad out the program with someone's home movies of last summer's trip to Vancouver. A *short brisk meeting* that strays on the subject at hand will encourage people to come back. Those who feel they would have been better to stay in front of their TV sets may never come back.
- (11) If you can, try to arrange for coffee and *refreshments* — usually cookies or doughnuts are enough. This will encourage people to stay around after the formal meeting. They will get to know each other, and increase the possibility of adding to your action group.
- (12) *Recognize that not everyone is "action-oriented."* If your group plans a militant or activist program, try to include something for those who, for whatever reason, prefer a more sedate life. This will broaden your membership base, and also improve your chances for later success.
- (13) Select a *chairman* for your first meeting with great care. If the chairman of the steering committee, or founding committee, has had little experience or still lacks confidence, it



may be wise to invite a guest chairman for the evening. Make yourself available to him (her) well before the meeting — at his convenience — so that he understands exactly what you are trying to do. This could be a chairman of another local group, a minister or priest, a member of the Legislature or local municipal politician, or someone from one of the organizations listed under “Sources of Assistance.” Your group chairman or president would introduce the guest chairman to the meeting, and get the feel of how to run future meetings. In some cases, people are coming together to generally talk over their concerns. In this case a chairman might not be needed.

- (14) To start the meeting, either present those who come with a *written background* of why you felt it necessary to call the meeting or explain why it was felt a citizen group was needed.
- (15) Make sure that someone in your group will be prepared to take *notes* (or ‘minutes’).
- (16) Plan a meeting of the group leaders or elected committee as soon as possible after the first meeting to start on the *follow-up*.
- (17) Before *closing* the meeting, make sure everyone knows what has been decided, and what is to happen next. Your chairman can be asked to help by summing up at the close. Always set a date — even if approximate — for a follow-up.
- (18) *Always be guided by what has come out of the meeting*, especially by a vote. It is easy for the organizers to feel they know better than those attending and there is often a temptation to go ahead in their own way regardless. This can only result in no local support, and no group. It may even cause the formation of an opposing organization.
- (19) You may want to have a *committee, or executive*, elected; if so, do it near the end of the meeting as many attending may be strangers. They will want an opportunity to hear different people’s views before voting. AT THIS MEETING — AND THIS MEETING ONLY — CONCENTRATE ON THE ISSUES FIRST AND THE PEOPLE LATER. By issues, this includes issues as they affect people, but ever afterwards consider people first. THIS IS THE PARTIAL EXCEPTION TO THE GENERAL RULE.



- (20) Be equipped with pens and sheets of lined paper or a cheap exercise book, and ask those attending to *register with name, address and telephone number*. You can then be sure of getting back to those individuals with any follow-up notices.

## ADJUSTMENTS UNDER “CRISIS” CONDITIONS

A group that is forming to face a crisis, of whatever kind, has to be able to organize very quickly. It often cannot follow the procedures outlined here simply because time does not permit. A meeting has to be called very quickly, wherever space can be hastily arranged. Notice of meeting will likely be by word of mouth — you hope to get as many as possible to start, and that others will hear or be contacted to join in later. Functions like founding committees, constitutions, and so on can wait until the action is under way to meet the crisis.

Your first meeting will likely be devoted almost entirely to a discussion of what strategies will be used. Don't forget however, that it will still be necessary to provide some background information for some people before they can contribute effectively. (Remember the questions on Pages 3 and 4). Action-oriented resource people will help as long as they are content to remain in an advisory capacity and not try to dictate the action. This is often hard for someone wholly geared to action.

Some 'crisis' groups get into arguments about who is supposed to be speaking on their behalf. It is wise to decide early on, who is to handle press releases, who will try to get the issue raised on TV or radio news if that applies, and who is to contact the necessary authorities (Councils, Governments, etc.).

**OVER ENTHUSIASTIC MEMBERS OF THE GROUP CAN OFTEN BE IMPETUOUS AND GO AHEAD ON THEIR OWN TO THE DETRIMENT OF THE GROUP.**

Research material can be expensive, and almost impossible for a group to obtain on short notice. Some bodies, like social planning councils, have archives full of research material on a variety of subjects, and some of these may help. Most groups, however, stay on “PEOPLE” issues rather than research. If the issue is big enough, others with more funds and staff at their disposal will pick up on the research. Make sure they know of your group, and that the

group has an opportunity to feed information into the research body. This will increase the likelihood of the research findings supporting your stand.

Having formed a group to meet a crisis, you will have to decide whether to meet this one issue only, or to continue (see on 'When to Quit'). This will also help you decide how much formality you need.

Handling a crisis issue is really a subject in itself, and will not be covered in greater detail here. Use your own discretion about obtaining help from the 'Sources of assistance' list.

### **Decision-Making**

Volumes have been written about the best method of decision-making. Some people feel that decisions should be made at the top by the chairman or executive committee. Others say that the members make the decisions and that the executive carry them out. There are also many variations between these choices.

The type of decision-making you will have will depend upon your members and the objectives of the group. So, keep the organization flexible until you can see what method best helps the group meet its objective.

## PART THREE

### STAYING TOGETHER

This section assumes that the group has gotten off the ground, and instead of being in the founding stages, it must turn its attention to the art of staying together.

### WHAT ABOUT MONEY?

A group that is being formed solely for discussion purposes can operate very efficiently on very little money. Coffee and snacks may be provided at meetings, but dimes or quarters from those present can purchase supplies for the next get-together.

HOWEVER, THIS IS AN EXCEPTION — MOST GROUPS NEED *SOME* MONEY. AT THE BEGINNING THEIR ESTIMATES OF THEIR NEEDS ARE OFTEN GREATLY EXAGGERATED BUT, AS THE GROUP GAINS IN KNOWLEDGE AND EXPERIENCE, IT FINDS MANY THINGS AVAILABLE FREE FOR THE ASKING. THIS APPLIES ESPECIALLY TO THE LOCAL COMMUNITY ORGANIZATION.

The fact still remains that many multi-purpose groups, and some single-purpose groups, need money to get off the ground. If they don't find a way to raise it, there's a good chance the group won't continue for long — or if it does, it won't be as effective as it might be.

A word of caution, then. Although money may seem all-important to you in your early plans (and it may be that you are right), it is a question which you would be wise to talk over thoroughly amongst yourselves, and seek advice and opinions from others.

If you decide your group does need money, you then have to decide how to raise it.

A dance, for example, sounds like a good idea, but you usually have several expenses before the first tune is played. Often, a deposit must be paid on the hall you choose. There are prizes, refreshments and other supplies to buy before anyone steps inside the door. It can become uncomfortable if a member of your group finances the expenses and you don't raise enough to cover the costs.

Membership fees can also help you get started, but the amount raised is not generally enough to do very much. Also, if the membership fee is set too high in order to raise money, people may balk at joining an unknown organization that charges a substantial fee. A person may risk a dollar or two, but often won't chance five dollars, at least until the group has proved itself.

OF COURSE, IT ALSO DEPENDS ON THE GENERAL AFFLUENCE OF THE AREA IN WHICH YOU WISH TO ORGANIZE. IN A LOWER INCOME AREA, YOU MAY FIND THAT FIFTY CENTS IS ALL YOU CAN RAISE FOR MEMBERSHIPS WITHOUT DISCOURAGING POTENTIAL MEMBERS, BUT YOU MAY BE COMPENSATED BY MORE WILLING WORKERS MORE USED TO DOING A JOB THAN PAYING TO HAVE IT DONE.

A recent experiment for community groups has been to dispense with fees altogether. All residents of a stated area are automatically entitled to the benefits of membership, perhaps by simply signing a statement of interest in the group. This can really generate interest when people can find out about a group without risking any money, but it doesn't help the group treasury.

Fortunately, there are increasing sources of funds available to citizen organizations. Quite recently, the Community Development Branch of the Ontario Government recognized that need for some funding to help groups get started, and is often prepared to help a group start up with no strings attached, but this is only to get you started — after that, you're on your own. Depending on your program plans, other organizations or government departments may be prepared to help. There are some private foundations that take an interest, especially in some kind of innovative service, and some Federal Government departments will assist a project if it is of national significance — perhaps something that no one has tried before.

Most bodies, private or government, have certain criteria your group must meet in order to receive a grant. This is only to be expected as they are handling either public or trust funds.

You may also locate your own source of funds. The only caution is to see that there are no strings attached that could inhibit your group in what it wants to achieve.

The Community Development Branch of the Ontario Government has recently prepared a booklet which list a variety of sources of assistance available to community groups. Included are not only financial assistance but also consultative and staff resource, printed materials and so on. Copies may be obtained by writing to the Branch at Room 380, 151 Bloor Street West, Toronto 5.

All questions about raising money for community or citizen group purposes have not yet been answered, but progress is most certainly being made.

### SOURCES OF ASSISTANCE (and what to expect from each)

Several references have been made to the fact that help IS available to you on request.

The sources vary from one district to another, but one or more of the following are usually available to you at no charge:

*THE COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT BRANCH OF THE ONTARIO GOVERNMENT* EMPLOYS CONSULTANTS WHO WILL VISIT AND ASSIST YOU ON REQUEST. THESE CONSULTANTS WILL BE ESPECIALLY HELPFUL IN DISTRICTS WHERE CITIZEN ORGANIZATION IS NOT YET HIGHLY DEVELOPED, AND LITTLE LOCAL HELP IS AVAILABLE. LIKE THE AGENCY PEOPLE MENTIONED BELOW THEY WILL ANSWER YOUR QUESTIONS BUT WILL NOT ATTEMPT TO IMPOSE THEIR OWN IDEAS OVER YOUR OWN. ONE OTHER WAY THE BRANCH STAFF WILL HELP IS BY ASSISTING YOU WITH THE PREPARATION OF A FORMAL REQUEST FOR FINANCIAL HELP.

The *ONTARIO WELFARE COUNCIL* and several *SOCIAL PLANNING COUNCILS* around the Province employ some first-rate people who will be glad to help you if they can. These organizations also have "volunteer" arms, which are like any other citizen organization. However, the volunteers come from all areas and backgrounds, and *may* not be conversant with the citizen-group scene in any particular locality. Staff hours are generally nine to five, but we have yet to hear of a staff person refusing to help a group in an evening if asked.



THERE ARE, OF COURSE, MANY OTHER *SOCIAL AGENCIES* MAINLY SERVING ENTIRELY DIFFERENT FUNCTIONS. IF YOU HAVE A CONTACT WITH ANY OF THEIR STAFF, THEY MAY BE ABLE TO ASSIST YOU FROM THEIR OWN GENERAL KNOWLEDGE, OR PUT YOU IN TOUCH WITH SOMEONE MORE KNOWLEDGEABLE IN THE MATTERS YOU NEED HELP WITH.

SMALLER COMMUNITIES THAT DO NOT HAVE PLANNING COUNCILS, OR SIMILAR ORGANIZATIONS, SOMETIMES HAVE *UNITED COMMUNITY SERVICES*, AND SOME EMPLOY STAFF IN FUNCTIONS SIMILAR TO THE PLANNING COUNCILS IN LARGER CENTRES.

ANOTHER VALUABLE SOURCE OF HELP IS THROUGH THE *FEDERATED OR "UMBRELLA" CITIZEN GROUPS*, SUCH AS THE ONTARIO FEDERATION OF CITIZENS' ASSOCIATIONS, THE ONTARIO TENANTS' ASSOCIATION, OR VARIOUS GROUPINGS OF RATEPAYERS OR OTHER TYPES OF GROUP. THESE ARE, OF COURSE, ALL VOLUNTEERS — PEOPLE JUST LIKE YOU, WHO HAVE BEEN THROUGH THE MILL AND KNOW WHERE THINGS ARE AT. THEY CAN OFFER ADVICE AND ASSISTANCE FROM THEIR OWN DIRECT EXPERIENCE AND WILL USUALLY RECOGNIZE THE PROBLEMS YOU ARE FACING.

Finally, do not overlook the possibility of help from a group a few blocks away from you. It is not always easy to identify a group, or to locate its leaders — usually it's a question of asking around. Such a group, close to your own location, probably shares some of the same problems and will often be glad to help. In any event, its members will appreciate the knowledge that you have started a group, and what you hope to do.

### ALTERNATIVE SOURCES

There are some other places where you might obtain help, but be careful, because although the quality of the help you get may be quite adequate, it may harm the development of your group. This does not follow automatically, but you may not yet have the experience to recognize the signs of possible trouble ahead.

Many churches will help, and ministers, and they often have plenty of organizational experience; the same applies to local elected representatives.

There is no question about the genuine desire to help on the part of these persons, but you do stand the risk of having potential members of your group unwilling to feel identified with some particular religious or political persuasion. Some persons resent the active involvement of an elected member of a political party. In other instances, seeing a Roman Catholic priest involved, some Protestants MAY feel that it is a Catholic organization, and not for them. There is generally no justification for such fears, but it pays you to be cautious, especially at the beginning.

Some people are presenting themselves as “Community Workers,” but have little or no experience or training. Some of these undoubtedly well-intentioned people can do your group more harm than good, so be sure to check out the background if you consider approaching such a person, or are approached by one. Make sure he or she knows what he or she is talking about.

Similarly, if and when you accept any financial help, make sure your whole group knows the circumstances; there must be absolutely no strings attached other than a reasonable measure of financial accountability (#) and no suggestion that your group has been ‘bought’.

- (#) This means members have the right to see the money has been spent for the group, and not for some individual’s benefit, but not to use the provision of money to try to dictate the actions of the group.

## WHEN TO QUIT

Many groups will face the question, “Should we quit or carry on?” at some time in their existence — some face it quite frequently. Many groups form, in fact, around one issue only, and may have no need to continue after that issue is resolved.

FIRST OF ALL, KEEP FIRMLY IN MIND THAT THERE IS NO REFLECTION ON A GROUP OR ITS MEMBERS IF THEY DECIDE THE GROUP NO LONGER SERVES A PURPOSE. IT MAY BE MUCH BETTER FOR ACTIVE PEOPLE INVOLVED IN THEIR COMMUNITY TO MOVE ON TO OTHER CHALLENGES MORE DESERVING OF THEIR ATTENTION.

If the group has dwindled in numbers and enthusiasm to the point where it can no longer function, it is better to call a meeting of those still interested, and suggest a resolution to “kill” the

organization. Either this will happen, or the ensuing discussion might suggest new endeavours that might be undertaken to revitalize the group.

Any money left on hand could be passed, if members agree, to another active organization working for an acceptable cause, given to a charity or medical research fund acceptable to your members, or deposited in a bank until some future issue requires the formation of a new group. If this is done, make sure all your group (and the bank, of course) know to whom the money could be paid and under what circumstances. If the amount is substantial, legal help might enable you to set up a trusteeship.

Current thinking suggests this is better than the old way some groups operated in the past — meeting an issue, then going into ‘limbo’ for a few years until something else required attention. When that happens, no one knows for sure if the organization still exists, and any new or potential group workers in a community are reluctant to start up a new group and perhaps tread on a lot of toes. CONSEQUENTLY, MANY OPPORTUNITIES FOR EFFECTIVE WORK ARE MISSED WHILE EVERYONE WAITS FOR SOMEONE ELSE TO “DO SOMETHING.”

Self-evaluation by a group should be a continuing thing, and when that evaluation says it’s time to quit, don’t fight it.

## PART IV

### SOME OF THE MORE TECHNICAL QUESTIONS

The pages you have read so far should give a beginner some fair idea about how to form a group, and where to obtain help when it is wanted.

In the early days of your group, other questions may be raised and decisions may be faced that involve more than simply calling a group together and setting up a few meetings — questions about such technical sounding subjects like “communications,” “structure,” “group relationships” and so on.

THIS LAST SECTION WILL ATTEMPT TO GIVE YOU SOME IDEAS FROM THE VOLUNTEER’S POINT OF VIEW. IT WON’T ANSWER EVERY QUESTION THAT ARISES, BUT WILL GIVE SOME BACKGROUND INFORMATION TO HELP YOU FIND YOUR OWN ANSWERS WHEN THE NEED ARISES.

#### STRUCTURE OR BE FREE . . .

Some citizen groups seem to have been organized by the sort of people who are sticklers for every detail. They like to see a group’s constitution or by-laws spell out everything to the maximum degree.

This is what is called a highly structured group — when everything is laid out in detail in an organization’s rules and regulations. A perfect example might be your own Municipal Government, with all its committees, departments, and books full of by-laws necessary for it to function effectively. This is structure far in excess of the needs of a citizen group.

Most of us are reasonably familiar with this kind of structure, from observation if not experience, and even when we are organizing to meet one of these structured bodies, we tend to adopt the same kind of structure ourselves. It’s often the only way we know.

On the other hand, a group might meet up with a recent university graduate who says, “Structure? What do you need structure for?” and then proceeds to explain how a group can dispense with tools like constitutions, executive officers, committees, by-laws, and so on.

“You don’t need a chairman or president,” he may say — “simply rotate the duties among your membership.”

There is enough truth in these arguments to make them sound believable, and it is admitted that this unstructured organization can be suitable to some types of group. Not only a debating club, but perhaps a council of local organizations sharing information, even if the local organizations are really committees of a handful of people. Each group could supply a chairman in rotation, and make its own notes of items of interest. Open forum groups, which may discuss issues but pass no resolutions and take no action, are another example.

FOR THE MAJORITY OF CITIZEN GROUPS — ESPECIALLY THOSE HANDLING MONEY OR ENGAGING IN ‘ACTION’ OF SOME KIND, THE TOTALLY UNSTRUCTURED SET-UP CAN BE HIGHLY DANGEROUS. IT PROVIDES NO RESTRICTION ON WHO IS TO HANDLE THE GROUP’S FUNDS, AND HOW; IT MAKES IT EVEN MORE DIFFICULT TO ESTABLISH CONTROL OVER HIGHLY ENTHUSIASTIC MEMBERS WHO INSIST ON GOING THEIR OWN WAY REGARDLESS OF GROUP OPINION. IT ALSO FAILS TO PROVIDE A FORMALIZED BASIS FOR SETTling DISPUTES AMONG MEMBERS.

It might also be added that the use of money by a group is one of the most frequent sources of discontent amongst members of that group.

One final hazard of the unstructured group is that it is more open to the smooth-talking individual who sees the group as a vehicle to be used for some hidden purpose — good or bad. When this happens, it is not until most of the original membership has left that someone asks, “What went wrong?”

Too much structure, on the other hand, can inhibit the group in a different way. If the purpose of the organization is detailed in the constitution as, “To organize and present objections to the re-zoning of . . . . . area.” then the group has given itself no mandate to work later on problems connected with day care in the area, youth activities, local pollution, or anything else.

The group could work on the same original project, and leave the future much more flexible if the constitution were to state instead:



“The purpose of . . . organization is to bring the greatest possible benefit to area residents in the fields of health, recreation, general education and social welfare.”

This sort of wording allows the group to do anything reasonable and still be free to face some future issue or crisis.

Many groups seem to have found the right balance between too much structure, and none at all; a new group should try to leave some provision for changes in its constitution at fairly frequent intervals as it grows in experience.

It is suggested that new groups, desiring some structure, limit the formality to an outline of the purpose of the group, control of money, duties and terms of its leaders, and future dissolution. It is always easier to add more when the group needs it than it is to remove structure once it has been created.

## COMMUNICATIONS AND PUBLICITY

Most groups need publicity at some time, either to reach out to potential new members, to advise the community at large about concerns or activities of the group, or to gain support around an issue.

At the same time, several groups have felt that the press has ‘used’ them, or their activities, only for sensationalism. Thus they become very reluctant to contact the media.

IT MAY CONSEQUENTLY BE WISE TO TAKE NOTE OF HOW YOUR LOCAL MEDIA HANDLES CITIZEN GROUP NEWS. DON’T FORGET THAT CITIZEN GROUPS ARE NEW TO YOU, AND MAY BE NEW TO THE MEDIA PEOPLE AS WELL – THEY MAY SIMPLY NOT UNDERSTAND WHAT YOU ARE DOING OR WHAT YOU ARE TRYING TO ACHIEVE.

It does seem reasonable to comment that the press will often give much more coverage to a sit-in or demonstration than it will to the constructive and on-going activities of most groups that may be rather less sensational, although equally or perhaps more worthwhile.

When your group wishes to advise the news media about a matter, the usual method is by a “Press release.”

This is a written statement by the group about the subject, and should advise the editor “WHO-WHAT-WHY-WHEN-WHERE.” It should also include the name and address of the sending group, and a contact person and telephone number for use if more information is required by the paper.

The press release should always be double-spaced, typewritten one side of a page only, with a wide margin on both sides. Try to use only one page if possible, and give the editor a clear indication when he has reached the end of the item. This is traditionally done by typing -30- two or three lines below the final line. Miss out on any of these suggestions, and you increase the risk that your press release will end up in the wastebasket.

Keep in your own mind, when sending a press release, that what seems to you to be a big story may not be so to a busy news editor. If you have the opportunity for a personal contact, take the release to the paper(s) in person.

Radio, and sometimes even TV should not be overlooked as useful media, either for press releases or public service announcements about forthcoming public meetings. Many stations are happy to co-operate if your group gives them fair notice.

MANY GROUPS REMEMBER THE NEED FOR COMMUNICATION, OR PUBLICITY, OUTSIDE THEIR MEMBERSHIP OR AREA, BUT SOMETIMES OVERLOOK THE EVEN MORE IMPORTANT NEED TO COMMUNICATE WITH MEMBERS AND POTENTIAL MEMBERS OF THE GROUP.

There are various ways to do this – one of the most effective is the periodic group newsletter. This is especially useful to a neighbourhood, community, or tenant group engaged in many different activities.

Internal communications can be seen as an important way of advertising. It's often not enough to put a message across only once – it should be done several times (if possible) to reach everyone. Each member of a group engaged in many functions, may be familiar with only a few of them.

Seek out your own method of communicating – newsletters a local news column in the weekly press, public meetings, word of mouth whenever possible, perhaps a system of area representatives each serving one block or one floor of an apartment building.

Your area representatives can also help with the distribution of notices or newsletters, and carry feed-back as well. This is most important.

EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATIONS MUST BE TWO-WAY COMMUNICATIONS. IT'S NOT ENOUGH FOR AN EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE TO ADVISE THE MEMBERSHIP ABOUT ALL THE GOOD WORK IT IS DOING. IT MUST HAVE THE ABILITY TO HEAR WHAT PEOPLE ARE SAYING IN THE AREA OR MEMBERSHIP, AND IT MUST BE ABLE TO RESPOND.

Good two-way communications will help to hold the group together, make it a viable and effective organization, and promote the ideal of frequent self-evaluation.

### INVOLVING MORE PEOPLE

Think about some of the more critical comments you may have heard from some people involved in citizen groups:

“The apathy around here is appalling”

“Our committee has to do everything”

“They all want the benefits, but no-one wants to help”

“We had several meetings, but hardly anyone came”

“We haven't had elections because no-one wants to run for office”

“People only come out if it's a big issue”

Any of these sound familiar? Are they valid complaints?

Let's look at some realities!

There IS apathy in many areas, but not as much as some people think. Many individuals ARE concerned, but have little knowledge to work from and are scared they might make themselves look silly. Some also fear retribution from some source or other. Many have grown up in an atmosphere of 'keep cool — don't get involved' or 'the experts know best.' These people need encouragement to participate and state their opinions.

A committee that 'has to do everything' often does so because it WANTS to do everything. Committee members feel a sense of

their own importance, and feel they can do a better job anyway. Not so. People very seldom volunteer for a job, but some would love to be asked!

No-one wants to help? One can't expect a mother of four or five young children to devote three evenings a week to supervising a drop-in centre. Nor can a man who works shift commit himself for regular attendance at anything, but MOST people are willing to take a share within their own capability. The more people your group has working, the less each individual has to do and the stronger the group becomes.

If people don't come to meetings, it may be because they didn't know about it, or didn't get enough notice to make suitable babysitting arrangements, had a prior commitment, or PERHAPS the topic under discussion was not of sufficient interest. Make sure your organization's meetings are interesting, and give everyone there a chance to participate. Everyone likes to believe his own opinions and views are important, AND IN A CITIZEN GROUP, *THEY ARE IMPORTANT.*

When nobody will run for office in an organization, it may be because those in office have taken too much on themselves and no one person will take it all over; it may be because they feel enmity might be caused with those gaining personal satisfaction from holding the office; it may also be BECAUSE NO ONE EVER ASKED, personally and sincerely!

People will come out for a big issue, because they recognize how it will affect them, and their lives or families. You don't get hundreds at any meeting, but careful publicity might point out how important a subject really is when people hadn't given it much thought before. An example might be the issue of pollution, almost unheard of a few years ago. This goes to show how very important your pre-meeting publicity is.

No one has yet found the whole answer to getting people involved, but a well-run group who can sincerely offer an invitation and a purpose will have the most success. Just remember (it cannot be over-emphasized) — we all like to feel that we count for something and that our personal views are important. When group leaders recognize this, they are on the way to having a well-supported group.

One word of warning. Don't get too carried away!



Some complaints have been heard about a group executive committee that tries to hand off everything, refusing to do even its own job. They, too, might wonder why more people don't get involved!

## RELATIONSHIPS WITH OTHER GROUPS

As your group gets itself organized, it will undoubtedly run into difficulties that seem, at first sight, insurmountable. As suggested in earlier sections, quite often a group that has been going longer can help.

Even beyond that, while many of the projects your group works on will be strictly local projects, there will also be times when you want to work on something that affects a borough, a whole city, a province, or even all Canada! For example, your group might want to start a day care centre, but isn't day care a national, or at the very least, a provincial problem? Many others must support your concerns. Your group might be organizing around a proposed zoning change, but won't that change also affect other communities around you? Pollution, while sometimes local in nature, is by no means a local problem only; neither is education, adult or children's.

You will therefore need to know who has groups going around you in the same general area, the same city, province, and so on. You may find several groups all sharing similar concerns, and collective action with them can not only save your members time and duplicated effort, but it may be also very much more effective if many groups co-operate.

There are organizations set up in the past year or two for these and similar reasons. They cannot possibly all be listed, but for a few examples, there is the Ontario Tenants' Association — and its purpose should be quite obvious, there are many 'umbrella' ratepayers organizations usually collected within a municipal government area, and there is the Ontario Federation of Citizens' Associations encompassing groups and interested individuals of all kinds. In addition, there are many informal meetings of groups in various places, often with no actual name. Once again, communication is essential.

Your group may be very well advised to affiliate with the 'umbrella' group of its choice — whichever seems closest to meeting your need. When doing so, make sure that your group



remains independent and autonomous (self-governing), and that it will be consulted fully before any decisions are made in its name. Most umbrella organizations are quite careful about this, but it pays to be sure. Check to see what (if anything) is required of your group, and what your group is offered.

**JUST AS WITHIN YOUR OWN GROUP, MEMBER ORGANIZATIONS WITHIN AN UMBRELLA BODY WILL RECEIVE AS MUCH AS THEY PUT INTO IT.**

Having made your choice, select your representatives, and be sure to make provision at your own meetings for them to report back to you about what is happening elsewhere. It makes no sense to be gathering information if no one in the group gets to hear it.

Many organizations don't realize the fact, especially at the early stages of their development, but many similar problems face tenants and ratepayers, welfare rights groups and businessmen's associations, food co-operatives and drop-in centres. When they all get together, citizen involvement will be a powerful tool indeed.

When you have gathered available information about the possible umbrella organizations with which your group might affiliate, it is wise to put the matter before your full membership rather than treat it as an executive decision only. Inter-group co-operation requires, at times, more than just a present committee, and potential future leaders should know what is going on. Make your recommendations, but, as in all things, allow the group to make the final decision knowing all relevant facts.

## **GATHERING INFORMATION**

Part of your relationship with other groups will be an in-flow of information useful to your group, and an awareness of "know-how" that might otherwise take months to develop. Depending on your special interests, your sources of information need not stop there.

A single-purpose organization can usually identify sources of information about its special interest simply by reading and listening.

A group formed for many different purposes has to go much further afield, and into a much wider range of subjects.

Affiliation with at least one member to other organizations can result in many leads to information when needed, or can add sources and contacts which are always good to have.

As a general list, applicable to most groups, the following might be considered important (not in order of importance):

Your local Social Planning Council

If in a community with no S.P.C., the Ontario Welfare Council

The 'umbrella' organization(s) of your choice

Any other group sharing your interests.

Furthermore, as many of your group as possible should get to know your local school trustee(s), alderman(men), provincial and federal members of parliament, school principal(s), local church clergy, and the staff of local newspapers. The local elected representatives are available and willing to help you with information about resources available and any concerns you may have.

Leaders, at least, should make contact with the Community Development Branch, and should become familiar with both government and private social services available in your community — welfare, marriage or family counselling, recreational, day care, emergency home-help services, services for pensioners, etc. Sooner or later, someone in your group will need such information.

THE WHOLE PROCESS OF COLLECTING INFORMATION  
USEFUL TO YOUR GROUP SHOULD NEVER CEASE.

### THE ROLE OF THE COMMUNITY WORKER

When you feel you have need of professional assistance, there are several 'consultant' services available to your group without charge. Generally speaking, these consultants, who will meet with you at your request on a matter of specific concern to you, are dedicated people on whom you can rely.

"Community Development" is becoming an increasingly popular phase, however, and all kinds and types of people are presenting themselves as 'community workers.' Some have neither field training — that is actually being involved within a group — nor academic training to qualify them for the job. Such people

MAY do your group more harm than good. The biggest fear groups have is the so-called community worker who only wants to use the group for his or her own purpose.

Fortunately, these are pretty rare, but there is no central registry or source of information about such people to help you to identify which kind any individual may be. It is suggested that, if you have doubts, you should check with either a known or recommended consultant, and find out where, when, and with what group(s) the prospective community worker has been involved. You will then be able to learn more even if from another city.

In the meantime — and the same applies to ANY community worker, you must make absolutely sure that he or she works under the direction of your group, and does the work your group wants him to do. He (or she, of course) must report back to your group, not to somewhere else giving you no control. Most good community workers DO work this way, and will appreciate you 'laying it on the line.' That's just the way they would want it to be.

## CONCLUSION

This booklet cannot attempt to tell you everything about citizen and community groups.

It is hoped that you have received from it some basic ideas with which you can get started. By participating in a citizen group you are taking part in our democratic society in a meaningful way. The introduction said you would run into frustrations — and you will, but they are outweighed by many rewarding experiences.

"Citizenship" will be to you, and your group, something more than an expression or a piece of paper; whatever the nature of your group, each member may rightfully feel that his community, city, province, and country have received benefit from every effort — no matter how small.

## APPENDIX "A"

### Sample Clauses or Articles for a Citizen Group Constitution

The following suggestions have been put, as far as possible, into everyday language. They are adequate for most unincorporated groups. If your group plans to incorporate, a legal advisor should be consulted.

Start by stating the name of the organization, and who may join:

The name of the organization shall be the Harvest Heights Community Association, and it shall be comprised of such persons who reside in the Harvest Heights area and who have paid the required membership fee.

Then give the purpose of the group:

The Association shall be operated in a manner so as to bring the greatest possible benefit to area residents in the fields of health, recreation, general education, and social welfare.

The Association shall try to encourage the idea of citizen participation in community affairs.

The Association shall be a vehicle for collective action on matters of concern to its members.

If the group is to have officers (or executives), state how many, their titles, and how often they should be elected:

Annually, during the months of . . . . or . . . . , or at the first opportunity thereafter, the following officers shall be elected by the membership: Chairman, two vice-chairmen, secretary and treasurer. These five officers shall form the executive committee of the Association.

State what the membership fee is to be:

There shall be a membership fee of one dollar per family per calendar year, payable in advance.

and then, who is to control Association money:

All funds belonging or entrusted to the Association shall be under the control of the Treasurer, who will present a statement of accounts to the membership (quarterly, annually). All funds shall be deposited in a financial institution which is a member of the Canada Deposit Insurance Corporation, and the signatures of the Treasurer and any one other officer shall be required to withdraw funds.

You may then wish to restrict spending large sums:

All expenditures over (fifty dollars) shall be submitted to the general membership for prior approval.

Many groups like to include a clear statement about affiliations:

The Association may in no way be connected with, or affiliated with any single political party, religious institution or commercial enterprise. It may establish desired relationships with other citizen or community organizations that have no partisan political, religious or commercial affiliation, provided that no controls are imposed on the Association.

A group should always specify how future additions or amendments may be made to its constitution:

This constitution may be amended by simple majority vote at any Annual General Meeting.

And the final point, to allow for dissolution when the group is no longer functioning:

The Executive Committee may, at its discretion dissolve the Association if its members believe it no longer serves any purpose, with any funds left on hand (state disposal).

Other items could of course be included — these are basics providing minimum structure. If you wish more, ask some other groups for copies of their constitution or by-laws for further ideas.



## APPENDIX "B"

### BIBLIOGRAPHY

Other books, leaflets or publications you may find useful:

Youth and Recreation Branch,  
Ontario Department of Education,  
559 Jarvis Street,  
Toronto, Ontario.

- a series of booklets, such as  
"Effective Meetings", "Community  
Organizations, etc. *(free)*

Community Development Branch,  
Department of the Provincial  
Secretary and Citizenship,  
151 Bloor Street West, Suite 380,  
Toronto 5, Ontario.

- Discussion Leader's Handbook *(free)*
- Conference Planning for Involvements *(free)*
- Resources Available to Citizen and  
Community Groups *(free)*

The Ontario Economic Council,  
950 Yonge Street, 7th floor,  
Toronto, Ontario.

- Immigrant Integration *(free)*
- Ontario Government Services *(\$5.00)*

Canadian Council on Social Development,  
55 Parkdale Avenue,  
Ottawa, Ontario.

- Housing and People — a bi-monthly  
newsletter *(\$2.00 per year)*

#### Social Planning Councils

- most local Councils publish a  
directory of community services  
on an annual basis. For further  
information contact your nearest  
Social Planning Council *(costs vary)*







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# Getting People Together



*Also Available:*

Conference Planning

Discussion Leaders' Handbook

Resources for Community Groups

Directory of Community Groups in Ontario

Public Participation in Planning Policy and Programme

Originally published in 1970

Reprinted in 1973, 1975, 1977

Available at the Ontario Government Bookstore

xx-xxxx 8/77 3M



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# Getting People Together



## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	PAGE
1. INTRODUCTION .....	1
2. GETTING TOGETHER .....	3
The Initial Contact Group .....	4
The Founding Committee .....	5
Building on the Founding Committee .....	5
The Constitution Committee .....	6
Temporary Executive .....	6
Where to Hold Meetings? .....	7
When to Meet? .....	8
Planning The First Public Meeting .....	8
Adjustments Under “Crisis” Conditions .....	12
Decision-Making .....	13
3. STAYING TOGETHER .....	14
What About Money .....	14
Sources of Assistance .....	15
Alternative Sources .....	17
When to Quit .....	17
4. SOME OF THE MORE TECHNICAL QUESTIONS .....	19
Structure or Be Free .....	19
Communications and Publicity .....	21
Involving More People .....	23
Relationships with Other Groups .....	25
Gathering Information .....	26
The Role of the Community Worker .....	27
5. CONCLUSION .....	28
APPENDIX A	
Sample Constitution Clauses .....	29





## 1. INTRODUCTION

This revised booklet, originally written in 1970 by Mr. P. G. Green, has been revised & republished in response to many requests made to the Ministry of Culture and Recreation regarding assistance in the establishment and development of community or neighbourhood groups. The following pages are intended only to serve as a general guide and should not be regarded as the final answer in organizing your group.

The past several years have seen a great increase in the involvement of people in the life of their community. No matter what you see as the reason for forming a group, you are not alone — thousands of Canadians have. Most of them with interests similar to yours will be happy to help or communicate with you. A *Directory of Community Groups in Ontario* has been recently published by the Ministry which will help you locate them.

## 2. GETTING TOGETHER

There is only one simple requirement for starting a group — people must see a need for it.

The initial organization can play a vital role in how the organization or group develops, and how effective it is in meeting its purposes. Some groups form gradually over a period of several weeks, while others are created to meet a special need when time is of the essence.

Groups formed over a longer time usually have the greatest long-term impact on people.

Even when working in a rush, it is wise to know how most groups get off the ground. An outline of how many Ontario groups have begun is therefore followed by some suggestions for adjustments that can be made under 'crisis' conditions.

Some questions should first be answered by anyone thinking about starting a group:—

### (1) WHAT IS IT FOR?

Apart from the overall benefits of involvement in a community, what are likely to be the purposes and objectives around which people will form a group?

### (2) WHAT WILL IT DO?

The initiators of a group should have some ideas or suggestions about what a new group could do to meet a need. The membership must, however, make all the final decisions. The impact of many people working together is so great that the thinking becomes "what WE want" instead of "what THEY want."

### (3) WHO IS LIKELY TO JOIN IT?

Is it to be local neighbourhood group or a geographically wider community of interest? Can it provide incentive for potential members to join?

#### (4) IS A NEW GROUP REALLY NEEDED FOR THIS PURPOSE?

Does one already exist? It is wise to look and ask around before starting a new group. You might end up in competition with one that has exactly the same objectives for the same people. There are times when a new group is necessary, when an old one has stagnated, but you would be very wise to find out whether you might be further ahead to revitalize an existing organization.

It is essential to be thinking clearly about the reasons for a new group, because people will soon be asking questions. Thoughtless answers can mean lost potential members, so to help you, the questions could also be restated another way.

(1) *What* do you want to do?

Why?

(2) *Who* do you want to do it?

Why?

(3) *When* do you want to do it?

Why?

(4) *How* do you want to do it?

Though these questions may seem childishly simple and perhaps even too basic, ask them of yourself and others. You may be surprised at some of the different answers you get from people you thought were all agreed. Then with brief, but clear and understandable answers to these questions ready, you have the beginning of a group.

#### THE INITIAL CONTACT GROUP

When you have sorted things out in your own mind, the next step is to find from four to a dozen other people who share your ideas. In a neighbourhood, this is easy if the concern you feel is widely reflected. Just talk to friends and neighbours. Some may be interested, but reluctant to "get involved." Remind them that no special talents are required. For example, if your concerns relate to children, staff at local schools might help, and parents of some of your own children's friends may share your ideas.

It's then a simple step to arrange an informal meeting at a convenient time and location when you have found the nucleus for a group. A private home is by far the best place for a relaxed, informal atmosphere. Talk over collectively your ideas.

## THE FOUNDING COMMITTEE

A 'Founding Committee' is really another name for a steering committee, but one which suggests less formalized structure. The name adequately defines the purpose.

The initial contact group may define itself as the 'Founding Committee' to initiate action, or it may try to arrange an open public meeting to see if additional people can be attracted at this stage.

The job of the Founding Committee is not to make a lot of decisions, but to seek out alternatives, to let people know the group is being formed, and to present firm suggestions about how it should proceed. Depending on the size of the group, the founding committee can, if that amount of formality is desired, also perform the functions of the 'Constitution Committee'. (See section on Constitution Committee below.)

## BUILDING ON THE FOUNDING COMMITTEE

Members of the group tend to recommend themselves by their own interest in the early stages, but many groups like to start letting people know they exist. A stampede doesn't often result, but some additional support can be added.

If the group is to serve a small well-defined district, a church or school in the area may be willing to help reproduce a leaflet describing the ambitions of the new group, and perhaps suggesting an informal meeting for anyone interested.

The first meeting a group holds is a very important one.

If an informal meeting is desired, a small room in a central location is best. Arrangements can usually be made for the use of a staff lounge at a school or a small meeting room at a church. Have more available, but don't put out more than about twenty chairs. However optimistic you may feel, it is always better psychologically to have to add additional chairs than to have a few people scattered among a hundred empty seats.

## THE CONSTITUTION COMMITTEE

As mentioned above, the functions of this short-term committee can quite easily be served by the founding (or steering) committee, or by the temporary executive. This is especially so if it is a very small group. However, if your first contact group feels a constitution is needed, and enough people are available and interested, it is far better to get them actively contributing right from the start. Avoid having a small group doing all the work unless no one else is presently available. To maintain their interest, some people might be invited to develop the constitution for the group. (Most groups have some informal statement of purpose or intent, but many others still like a formal constitution.)

The need and relative benefits of having or not having a constitution are discussed in Part. IV. Here, it is enough to suggest that if the group intends to handle any funds it is usually considered to be beneficial to have a constitution that includes directions for control of group moneys.

Some sample clauses for citizen group constitutions are included in an appendix at the back of this booklet.

The constitution committee should try to have proposals for the group constitution ready to present to the founding meeting for approval. Sometimes, changes are voted, additions or deletions are made by the membership, and the committee has to incorporate such changes in the final constitution. Once this job is completed, the constitution committee is disbanded, and its members go on to other activities. The committee can always be revived if there seems to be a need.

## TEMPORARY EXECUTIVE

There are two big reasons why a group's first executive committee should be appointed for a short term only.

In the first place, you will expect your group to grow and may make contact with interested and helpful people after it has started. You may want some of these people on your executive.

Even more important is the fact that, at the outset, people will know very few of those attending the meetings, and even a nodding acquaintance gives little idea as to how capable people may be in a certain role. Some of those elected may also be new to



citizen involvement, and find they would be happier if they didn't have the worry of a leadership role once they try it.

It is suggested, then, that it would be very wise to elect your first executive committee for about a three-month term to start with, then for a nine-month term, and annually thereafter.

Nearly all citizen groups have an "Executive Committee" or at least a group that performs the functions of one, but the name may sound terribly formal to you. If it does, change it to any name acceptable to your members, but make sure everyone knows what is expected of him.

## WHERE TO HOLD MEETINGS?

A neighbourhood or community type of group should try to find a location central to the area it wishes to serve. Many Ontario school boards are beginning to make school facilities available in the evenings without charge to worthwhile community organizations, and your local school authorities or trustees can advise you if this applies to your area.

Some churches are also willing to accommodate you, as long as the day and time you select does not conflict with any of their own meetings. You will find they often have to obtain approval of various boards or committees, so give them plenty of notice.

Many other possible places suggest themselves — libraries, union or legion halls, municipal buildings and so on.

Don't get carried away and book a room for which you have to pay a lot of money. You may find the payment coming from your own pocket. Also, don't book too large a room so those attending become 'lost' in it, or have to shout to be heard. For a small meeting, a lounge is usually better than an auditorium, and a cosy basement better than a huge Sunday School room.

Space is almost always available when you start looking around; in fact you'll probably be quite surprised at how helpful many people are once your group gets going.

A special interest group — for example, a city-wide group forming to work on pollution problems — should try to find a location as central as possible within the city to avoid having

anyone travel too far. Also, keep in mind that some of those who come may not be familiar with the district. If you have a choice, a location on a main road is preferable to a small side street. Try to give some simple directions, and find out ahead of time what the parking situation is like at the time you want to meet.

## **WHEN TO MEET?**

Most groups are best served by holding meetings in the evenings. Some, such as a women's coffee club or the "Take-a-Break" groups, have to meet in the daytime, as may some especially designed for shift workers. In general, however, evenings are best. Young children are in bed, and babysitting is usually available. Working people are also home after supper and may be attracted out for something worthwhile.

A commonly used starting time is 8 p.m., but keep in mind the interests of the people you hope to attract. For example, some may not want to give up an interesting hockey game on TV!

Not so long ago, Tuesdays and Thursdays were always considered good "meeting" nights. However, there are so many activities going on these days that some organizations find Mondays less competitive for people's time. Fridays are bad, being a common shopping night, entertainment night, or people may be off somewhere for a weekend. Weekends are generally disastrous except for occasional special events, but some groups are finding Sunday evenings increasingly acceptable.

## **PLANNING THE FIRST PUBLIC MEETING**

Many new groups have been extremely disappointed when, having finally got to the point of calling their first public meeting, only a handful of friends and relatives show up!

It is no longer enough to reserve space, stick a notice on a lamppost, and wait for everyone to arrive! Your first meeting must have particularly careful planning and publicity. Try to put yourself outside the area of being directly involved, and ask yourself: "Would I go to that meeting?", "Who's holding it?", "What's it for?", "Is it worth paying a babysitter?"

These are some of the questions that you have to answer before they are asked, in your pre-meeting publicity.

A lot may depend on what main issues you are organizing your group around. You can probably count on solid support from neighbours if it's because a developer wants to erect a high-rise apartment in your back yard!

If your 'thing' is to provide children's recreation or after school care, then of course all parents — especially working parents — have reason to be interested, and your local school may like to help with publicity. A group that has the desire to go into several fields of endeavour will likely start in a very small way, and grow more slowly than one with a big immediate issue to face, but that group will often be stronger and longer lasting for the slower growth under sound leadership.

When planning that all-important first meeting, therefore, you will find that most or all of the following points are worth considering:—

- (1) Try to set a *date* about three weeks ahead if you can. This will allow time to work on publicity.
- (2) Call or write your *local newspaper(s)* and *radio station(s)*, advising them about the meeting and why it is being called. Unless you want to avoid the press, invite them to the meeting. (Some groups are adamantly opposed to the presence of reporters, especially if they are to be engaged in some sort of "pressure" action. It takes experience to really decide when the press may be helpful but, as a general rule, they can help with publicity that is necessary to get your group off the ground.)
- (3) *Letters to the 'Editor'* about the main issues you wish to present can arouse interest in these issues before people hear about the meeting.
- (4) If your meeting concerns a local geographical area, *door-to-door newsletters* can help — but don't expect great results from these alone. Teenagers are often a big help with distribution and can do a very responsible job. If time permits, a knock at each door with personal delivery is much better, and gives you an opportunity to answer 'on-the-spot' questions.
- (5) Make sure your leaflet or newsletter contains *point of contact* — address and telephone number, with several names of

people in your group. This may encourage people to contact you, and will assure them that this is a local project started by their neighbours.

- (6) Remind all on your initial contact group, or committee, (and their wives and husbands) to *mention the proposed meeting to friends* and neighbours at every opportunity. Try to get a firm commitment from each contact.
- (7) About two weeks ahead, ask *local ministers* to announce the meeting (and the reason for it) to their congregations.
- (8) Try to arrange for a *well-known guest* to be at your meeting to speak briefly and perhaps answer some questions. It does not have to be a nationally famous figure, but someone known and respected locally or whose name has been in the news about the issue(s) in which you are interested. Some may come to hear this guest who might not otherwise have shown interest.
- (9) Ensure your publicity mentions the *name* of that person, and the reason, if possible, why he or she will attend (i.e. to speak on pollution, etc.).
- (10) Avoid any temptation to pad out the program with someone's home movies of last summer's trip to Vancouver. A *short brisk meeting* that stays on the subject at hand will encourage people to come back. Those who feel they would have been better to stay in front of their TV sets may never come back.
- (11) If you can, try to arrange for coffee and *refreshments* — usually cookies or doughnuts are enough. This will encourage people to stay around after the formal meeting. They will get to know each other, and increase the possibility of adding to your action group.
- (12) *Recognize that not everyone is "action-oriented."* If your group plans a militant or activist program, try to include something for those who, for whatever reason, prefer a more sedate life. This will broaden your membership base, and also improve your chances for later success.
- (13) Select a *chairman* for your first meeting with great care. If the chairman of the steering committee, or founding com-



mittee, has had little experience or still lacks confidence, it may be wise to invite a guest chairman for the evening. Make yourself available to him (her) well before the meeting — at his convenience — so that he understands exactly what you are trying to do. This could be a chairman of another local group, a minister or priest, a member of the Legislature or local municipal politician, or someone from one of the organizations listed under “Sources of Assistance.” Your group chairman or president would introduce the guest chairman to the meeting, and get the feel of how to run future meetings. In some cases, people are coming together to generally talk over their concerns. In this case a chairman might not be needed.

- (14) To start the meeting, either present those who come with a *written background* of why you felt it necessary to call the meeting or explain why it was felt a citizen group was needed.
- (15) Make sure that someone in your group will be prepared to take *notes* (or ‘minutes’).
- (16) Plan a meeting of the group leaders or elected committee as soon as possible after the first meeting to start on the *follow-up*.
- (17) Before *closing* the meeting, make sure everyone knows what has been decided, and what is to happen next. Your chairman can be asked to help by summing up at the close. Always set a date — even if approximate — for a follow-up.
- (18) *Always be guided by what has come out of the meeting*, especially by a vote. It is easy for the organizers to feel they know better than those attending and there is often a temptation to go ahead in their own way regardless. This can only result in no local support, and no group. It may even cause the formation of an opposing organization.
- (19) You may want to have a *committee, or executive*, elected; if so, do it near the end of the meeting as many attending may be strangers. They will want an opportunity to hear different people’s views before voting. **AT THIS MEETING — AND THIS MEETING ONLY — CONCENTRATE ON THE ISSUES FIRST AND THE PEOPLE LATER.** By issues, this includes issues as they affect people, but ever afterwards con-



sider people first. THIS IS THE PARTIAL EXCEPTION TO THE GENERAL RULE.

- (20) Be equipped with pens and sheets of lined paper or a cheap exercise book, and ask those attending to *register with name, address and telephone number*. You can then be sure of getting back to those individuals with any follow-up notices.

## ADJUSTMENTS UNDER “CRISIS” CONDITIONS

A group that is forming to resolve an immediate problem, of whatever kind, has to be able to organize very quickly. It often cannot follow the procedures outlined here simply because time does not permit. A meeting has to be called very quickly, wherever space can be hastily arranged. Notice of meeting will likely be by word of mouth — you hope to get as many as possible to start, and that others will hear or be contacted to join in later. Functions like founding committees, constitutions, and so on can wait until the action is under way to meet the crisis.

Your first meeting will likely be devoted almost entirely to a discussion of what options are available. Don't forget however, that it will still be necessary to provide some background information for some people before they can contribute effectively. (Remember the questions on Page 3 and 4.) Action-oriented resource people will help as long as they are content to remain in an advisory capacity and not try to dictate the action. This is often difficult for someone wholly geared to action.

Some ‘crisis’ groups get into arguments about who is supposed to be speaking on their behalf. It is wise to decide early on, who is to handle press releases, who will try to get the issue raised on TV or radio news if that applies, and who is to contact the necessary authorities (Councils, Governments, etc.).

Over enthusiastic members of the group can often be impetuous and go ahead on their own to the detriment of the group.

Research material can be expensive, and almost impossible for a group to obtain on short notice. Some bodies, like social planning councils, have archives full of research material on a variety of subjects, and some of these may help. Most groups, however, stay on “PEOPLE” problems rather than research. If the issue is big enough, others with more funds and staff at their disposal will pick up on the research. Make sure they know of your group, and

that the group has an opportunity to feed information into the research body. This will increase the likelihood of the research findings supporting your stand.

Having formed a group to meet a need, you will have to decide whether to meet this one need only, or to continue (see on 'When to Quit'). This will also help you decide how much structure the group requires.

Handling an immediate issue is really a subject in itself, and will not be covered in greater detail here. Use your own discretion about obtaining help from the 'Sources of assistance' list.

## DECISION-MAKING

Volumes have been written about the best method of decision-making. Some people feel that decisions should be made at the top by the chairman or executive committee. Others say that the members make the decisions and that the executive carry them out. There are also many variations between these choices.

The type of decision-making you will have will depend upon your members and the objectives of the group. So, keep the organization flexible until you can see what method best helps the group meet its objective.

### 3. STAYING TOGETHER

This section assumes that the group is well off the ground, and instead of being in the founding stages, it must turn its attention to the art of staying together.

#### WHAT ABOUT MONEY?

A group that is being formed solely for discussion purposes can operate very efficiently on very little money. Coffee and snacks may be provided at meetings, but dimes or quarters from those present can purchase supplies for the next get-together.

However, this is an exception — most groups need *some* money. At the beginning their estimates of their needs are often greatly exaggerated but, as the group gains knowledge and experience, it finds many things available free for the asking. This applies especially to local community association.

The fact still remains that many multi-purpose groups, and some single-purpose groups, need money to get off the ground. If they don't find a way to raise it, there's a good chance the group won't continue for long — or if it does, it won't be as effective as it might be.

A word of caution, then. Although money may seem all-important to you in your early plans (and it may be that you are right), it is a question which you would be wise to talk over thoroughly amongst yourselves, and seek advice and opinions from others.

If you decide your group does need money, you then have to decide how to raise it.

Membership fees can help you get started, but the amount raised is not generally enough to do very much. Also, if the membership fee is set too high in order to raise money, people may balk at joining an unknown organization that charges a substantial fee. A person may risk a dollar or two, but often won't chance five dollars, at least until the group has proved itself.

Some groups have dispensed with fees altogether. All residents of a stated area are automatically entitled to the benefits of mem-

bership, perhaps by simply signing a statement of interest in the group. This can really generate interest when people can find out about a group without risking any money, but it doesn't help the group treasury.

Fortunately, there are increasing sources of funds available to citizen organizations. The Ontario Government has recognized the need for some funding to help groups get started, and is often prepared to help a group. Depending on your program plans, other organizations or levels of government may be prepared to help. There are some private foundations that take an interest, especially in some kind of innovative service, and some Federal Government departments will assist a project.

Most bodies, private or government, have certain criteria your group must meet in order to receive a grant. This is only to be expected as they are handling either public or trust funds.

You may also locate your own source of funds. The only caution is to see that there are no strings attached that could inhibit your group in what it wants to achieve.

The Ministry of Culture and Recreation publishes a booklet which lists a variety of resources available to community groups; not only financial assistance but also consultative and staff resources, printed and audio-visual aids, speakers and other types of information useful to groups and individuals concerned about making their community a better place to live. This book is available from the Multicultural Development Branch of the Ministry at Queen's Park, and in the Ontario Government Bookstore, 880 Bay Street, Toronto.

In addition, there is a series of booklets available from the Ministry entitled "Notes for Community Leaders" with titles such as: Effective Meetings, Speaking in Public, Leaders and Members, Publicity and Public Relations, and Community Organizations.

## **SOURCES OF ASSISTANCE** (and what to expect from each)

Several references have been made to the fact that help IS available to you on request.

The sources vary from one district to another, but one or more of the following are usually available to you at no charge:



Most ministries of the ONTARIO GOVERNMENT employ staff persons who will assist you on request. These consultants may be especially helpful in providing basic information, directing the group to various sources of assistance, and so on. An amazing variety of types of resources are available free to individuals and groups. All you have to do is ask!

Many *SOCIAL PLANNING COUNCILS* around the Province employ some first-rate people who will be glad to help you if they can. These organizations also have “volunteer” arms, which are like any other citizen organization. However, the volunteers come from all areas and backgrounds, and *may* not be conversant with the citizen-group scene in any particular locality. Staff hours are generally nine to five, but we have yet to hear of a staff person refusing to help a group in an evening if asked.

There are, of course, many *SOCIAL AGENCIES* such as Information Centres and Volunteer Bureaux which provide a variety of services to the community. They may be able to assist you from their general knowledge, or put you in touch with someone more knowledgeable than themselves.

Smaller communities that do not have social planning councils or similar organizations sometimes have *UNITED COMMUNITY SERVICES*, and some employ staff in functions similar to the planning councils in larger centres.

Another valuable source of help is through *FEDERATED OR UMBRELLA CITIZENS' GROUPS*. These are, of course, all volunteers — people just like you who have been through the mill and know where “things are at”. They may offer advice and assistance from their own experience and will usually recognize the problems you are facing.

Finally, do not overlook the possibility of help from a group a few blocks away from you. It is not always easy to identify a group, or to locate its leaders — usually it's a question of asking around. Such a group, close to your own location, probably shares some of the same problems and will often be glad to help. In any event, its members will appreciate the knowledge that you have started a group, and what you hope to do.



## ALTERNATIVE SOURCES

Many churches and ministers will help; they often have plenty of organizational experiences. The same applies to local elected representatives and municipal officials who could provide groups with information on the appropriate department to contact for maps, studies or reports.

An additional community resource is the community college or university. Often groups will find faculty persons interested in their areas of concern and willing to provide information or professional assistance of some nature. In this way resources ranging from expertise to volunteer researchers and meeting space could be made available.

Some people may present themselves as “Community Workers” but have little or no experience or training. Some of these undoubtedly well-intentioned people can do your group more harm than good, so be sure to check out the background if you consider approaching such a person, or are approached by one. Make sure they know what they are talking about.

## WHEN TO QUIT

Many groups will face the question, “Should we quit or carry on?” at some time in their existence — some face it quite frequently. Many groups form, in fact, around one issue only, and many have no need to continue after that.

Keep firmly in mind that there is no reflection on a group or its members if they decide the group no longer serves a purpose. It may be much better for active people involved in their community to move on to other challenges more deserving of their attention.

If the group has dwindled in numbers and enthusiasm to the point where it can no longer function, it is better to call a meeting of those still interested, and suggest a resolution to “kill” the organization. Either this will happen, or the ensuing discussion might suggest new endeavours that might be undertaken to revitalize the group.

Any money left on hand could be passed, if members agree, to another active organization working for an acceptable cause, given to a charity or medical research fund acceptable to your members, or deposited in a bank until some future issue requires the forma-

tion of a new group. If this is done, make sure all your group (and the bank, of course) know to whom the money could be paid and under what circumstances. If the amount is substantial, legal help might enable you to set up a trusteeship.

Current thinking suggests this is better than the old way some groups operated in the past — meeting an issue, then going into ‘limbo’ for a few years until something else required attention. When that happens, no one knows for sure if the organization still exists, and any new or potential group workers in a community are reluctant to start up a new group and perhaps tread on a lot of toes. Consequently, many opportunities for effective work are missed while everyone waits for someone else to “do something.”

Self-evaluation by a group should be a continuing thing, and when that evaluation says it’s time to quit, don’t fight it.

## 4. SOME OF THE MORE TECHNICAL QUESTIONS

The pages you have read so far should give a beginner some fair idea about how to form a group, and where to obtain help when it is wanted.

In the early days of your group, other questions may be raised and decisions may be faced that involve more than simply calling a group together and setting up a few meetings — questions about such technical sounding subject like “communications,” “structure,” “group relationships” and so on.

This last section will attempt to give you some ideas from the volunteer's point of view. It won't answer every question that arises, but will give some background information to help you find your own answers when the need arises.

### STRUCTURE OR BE FREE . . .

Some community groups seem to have been organized by the sort of people who are sticklers for every detail. They like to see a group's constitution or by-laws spell out everything to the maximum degree.

This is what is called a highly structured group — when everything is laid out in detail in an organization's rules and regulations. A perfect example might be your own Municipal Government, with all its committees, departments, and books full of by-laws necessary for it to function effectively. This is structure far in excess of the needs of a community group.

Most of us are reasonably familiar with this kind of structure, from observation if not experience, and even when we are organizing to meet one of these structured bodies, we tend to adopt the same kind of structure ourselves. It's often the only way we know.

On the other hand, a group might meet up with a recent university graduate who says, “Structure? What do you need structure for?” and then proceeds to explain how a group can dispense with tools like constitutions, executive officers, committees, by-laws, and so on.

“You don’t need a chairman or president,” he may say — “simply rotate the duties among your membership.”

There is enough truth in these arguments to make them sound believable, and it is admitted that this unstructured organization will be suitable for some groups: not only a debating club, but perhaps a council of local organizations sharing information, even if the local organizations are really committees of a handful of people. Each group could supply a chairman in rotation, and make its own notes of items of interest. Open forum groups, which may discuss issues but pass no resolutions and take no action, are another example.

For the majority of citizen groups — especially those handling money or engaging in ‘action’ of some kind, the totally unstructured set-up can be highly dangerous. It provides no restriction on who is to handle the group’s funds, and how; it makes it even more difficult to establish control over highly enthusiastic members who insist on going their own way regardless of group opinion. It also fails to provide a formalized basis for settling disputes among members.

It might also be added that the use of money by a group is one of the most frequent sources of discontent amongst members of that group.

One final hazard of the unstructured group is that it is more open to the smooth-talking individual who sees the group as a vehicle to be used for some hidden purpose — good or bad. When this happens, it is not until most of the original membership has left that someone asks, “What went wrong?”

Too much structure, on the other hand, can inhibit the group in a different way. If the purpose of the organization is detailed in the constitution as, “To organize and present objections to there-zoning of . . . . area.” then the group has given itself no mandate for future work on problems connected with day care in the area, youth activities, local pollution, or anything else.

The group could work on the same original project, and leave the future much more flexible if the constitution were to state instead:

“The purpose of . . . organization is to bring the greatest possible benefit to area residents in the fields of health, recreation, general education and social welfare.”

This sort of wording allows the group to do anything reasonable and still be free to face some future issue or crisis.

Many groups seem to have found the right balance between too much structure, and none at all; a new group should try to leave some provision for changes in its constitution at fairly frequent intervals as it grows in experience.

It is suggested that new groups, desiring some structure, limit the formality to an outline of the purpose of the group, control of money, duties and terms of its leaders, and future dissolution. It is always easier to add more when the group needs it, than it is to remove structure once it has been created.

## COMMUNICATIONS AND PUBLICITY

Most groups need publicity at some time, either to reach out to potential new members, to advise the community at large about concerns or activities of the group, or to gain support around an issue.

At the same time, several groups have felt that the press has ‘used’ them, or their activities, only for sensationalism. Thus they become very reluctant to contact the media.

Consequently it may be wise to take note of how your local media handles citizen group news. Don’t forget that citizen groups are new to you, and may be new to the media people as well — they may simply not understand what you are doing or what you are trying to achieve.

It does seem reasonable to comment that the press will often give much more coverage to a sit-in or demonstration than it will to the constructive and on-going activities of most groups that may be rather less sensational, although equally or perhaps more worthwhile.

When your group wishes to advise the news media about a matter, the usual method is by a “Press release.”



This is a written statement by the group about the subject, and should advise the editor “WHO-WHAT-WHY-WHEN-WHERE.” It should also include the name and address of the sending group, and a contact person and telephone number for use if more information is required by the paper.

The press release should always be double-spaced, typewritten one side of a page only, with a wide margin on both sides. Try to use only one page if possible, and give the editor a clear indication when he has reached the end of the item. This is traditionally done by typing —30— two or three lines below the final line. Miss out on any of these suggestions, and you increase the risk that your press release will end up in the wastebasket.

Keep in your own mind, when sending a press release, that what seems to you to be a big story may not be so to a busy news editor. If you have the opportunity for a personal contact, take the release to the paper(s) in person.

Radio, and sometimes even TV should not be overlooked as useful media, either for press releases or public service announcements about forthcoming public meetings. Many stations are happy to co-operate if your group gives them fair notice.

Many groups remember the need for communication, or publicity, outside their membership or area, but sometimes overlook the even more important need to communicate with members and potential members of the group.

There are various ways to do this — one of the most effective is the periodic group newsletter. This is especially useful to a neighbourhood, community, or cultural group engaged in many different activities.

Internal communications can be seen as an important way of advertising. It's often not enough to put a message across only once — it should be done several times (if possible) to reach everyone. Each member of a group engaged in many functions, may be familiar with only a few of them.

Seek out your own method of communicating — newsletters, a local news column in the weekly press, public meetings, word of mouth whenever possible, perhaps a system of area representatives each serving one block or one floor of an apartment building.

Your area representatives can also help with the distribution of notices or newsletter, and carry feed-back as well. This is most important.

Effective communications must be two-way communications. It's not enough for an executive committee to advise the membership about all the good work it is doing. It must have the ability to hear what people are saying in the area or membership, and it must be able to respond.

Good two-way communications will help to hold the group together, make it a viable and effective organization, and promote the ideal of frequent self-evaluation.

## INVOLVING MORE PEOPLE

Think about some of the more critical comments you may have heard from some people involved in citizen groups:

“The apathy around here is appalling”

“Our committee has to do everything”

“They all want the benefits, but no-one wants to help”

“We had several meetings, but hardly anyone came”

“We haven't had elections because no-one wants to run for office”

“People only come out if it's a big issue”

Any of these sound familiar? Are they valid complaints?

Let's look at some realities!

There is apathy in many areas, but not as much as some people think. Many individuals are concerned, but have little knowledge to work from and are scared they might make themselves look silly. Some also fear retribution from some source or other. Many have grown up in an atmosphere of ‘keep cool — don't get involved’ or ‘the experts know best.’ These people need encouragement to participate and state their opinions.

A committee that ‘has to do everything’ often does so because it WANTS to do everything. Committee members feel a sense of their own importance, and feel they can do a better job anyway.

Not so. People very seldom volunteer for a job, but some would love to be asked!

No-one wants to help? One can't expect a mother of four or five young children to devote three evenings a week to supervising a drop-in centre. Nor can a man who works shift commit himself for regular attendance at anything, but MOST people are willing to take a share within their own capability. The more people your group has working, the less each individual has to do and the stronger the group becomes.

If people don't come to meetings, it may be because they didn't know about it, or didn't get enough notice to make suitable baby-sitting arrangements, had a prior commitment, or perhaps the topic under discussion was not of sufficient interest. Make sure your organization's meetings are interesting, and give everyone there a chance to participate. Everyone likes to believe his own opinions and views are important, and in a community group, they *are* important.

When nobody will run for office in an organization, it may be because those in office have taken too much on themselves and no one person will take it all over; it may be because they feel enmity might be caused with those gaining personal satisfaction from holding the office; it may also be BECAUSE NO ONE EVER ASKED, personally and sincerely!

People will come out for a big issue, because they recognize how it will affect them, and their lives or families. You don't get hundreds at any meeting, but careful publicity might point out how important a subject really is when people hadn't given it much thought before. An example might be the issue of pollution, almost unheard of a few years ago. This goes to show how very important your pre-meeting publicity is.

No one has yet found the whole answer to getting people involved, but a well-run group who can sincerely offer an invitation and a purpose will have the most success. Just remember (it cannot be over-emphasized) – we all like to feel that we count for something and that our personal views are important. When group leaders recognize this, they are on the way to having a well-supported group.

One word of warning. Don't get too carried away!

Some complaints have been heard about a group executive committee that tries to hand off everything, refusing to do even its own job. They, too, might wonder why more people don't get involved!

## RELATIONSHIPS WITH OTHER GROUPS

As your group gets itself organized, it will undoubtedly run into difficulties that seem, at first sight, insurmountable. As suggested in earlier sections, quite often a group that has been going longer can help.

Even beyond that, while many of the projects your group work on will be strictly local projects, there will also be times when you want to work on something that affects a borough, a whole city, a province, or even all Canada! For example, your group might want to start a day care centre, but isn't day care a national, or at the very least, a provincial problem? Many others must support your concerns. Your group might be organizing around a proposed zoning change, but won't that change also affect other communities around you? Pollution, while sometimes local in nature, is by no means a local problem only; neither is education, adult or children's.

You will therefore need to know who has groups going around you in the same general area, the same city, province, and so on. You may find several groups all sharing similar concerns, and collective action with them can not only save your members time and duplicated effort, but it may be also very much more effective if many groups co-operate.

Your group may be very well advised to affiliate with the 'umbrella' group of its choice — whichever seems closest to meeting your need. When doing so, make sure that your group remains independent and autonomous (self-governing), and that it will be consulted fully before any decisions are made in its name. Most umbrella organizations are quite careful about this, but it pays to be sure. Check to see what (if anything) is required of your group, and what your group is offered.

Just as within your own group, member organizations within an umbrella body will receive as much as they put into it.

Having made your choice, select your representatives, and be sure to make provision at your own meetings for them to report



back to you about what is happening elsewhere. It makes no sense to be gathering information if no one in the group gets to hear it.

Many organizations don't realize the fact, especially at the early stages of their development, but many similar problems face folk festival groups, cultural groups, welfare rights groups and businessmen's associations, arts and crafts groups, food co-operatives drop-in centres and community school groups. When they all get together, citizen involvement will be a powerful tool indeed.

When you have gathered available information about the possible umbrella organizations with which your group might affiliate, it is wise to put the matter before your full membership rather than treat it as an executive decision only. Inter-group co-operation requires, at times, more than just a present committee, and potential future leaders should know what is going on. Make your recommendations, but, as in all things, allow the group to make the final decision knowing all relevant facts.

## GATHERING INFORMATION

Part of your relationship with other groups will be an in-flow of information useful to your group, and an awareness of "know-how" that might otherwise take months to develop. Depending on your special interests, your sources of information need not stop there.

A single-purpose organization can usually identify sources of information about its special interest simply by reading and listening.

A group formed for many different purposes has to go much further afield, and into a much wider range of subjects.

Affiliation of at least one member of the group to other organizations can result in many leads to information when needed, or can add sources and contacts which are always good to have.

Futhermore, as many of your group as possible should get to know your local school trustee(s), alderman(men), provincial and federal members of parliament, school principal(s), local church clergy, and the staff of local newspapers. The local elected representatives are available and willing to help you with information about resources available and any concerns you may have.



Leaders, at least, should become familiar with both government and private services available in the community:— libraries, information centres, cultural, recreational, day care, emergency home-help services, services for pensioners, etc. Sooner or later, someone in your group will need such information.

THE WHOLE PROCESS OF COLLECTING INFORMATION USEFUL TO YOUR GROUP SHOULD NEVER CEASE.

## THE ROLE OF THE COMMUNITY WORKER

When you feel you need professional assistance, there are several 'consultant' services available to your group without charge. Generally speaking, these consultants, who will meet with you at your request on a matter of specific concern to you, are dedicated people on whom you can rely.

"Community Development" is a popular phase, and all kinds and types of people are presenting themselves as 'community workers.' Some have neither field training — that is actually being involved within a group — nor academic training to qualify them for the job. Such people MAY do your group more harm than good. The biggest fear groups have is the so-called community worker who only wants to use the group for his or her own purpose.

Fortunately, these are pretty rare, but there is no central registry or source of information about such people to help you to identify which kind any individual may be. It is suggested that, if you have doubts, you should check with either a known or recommended consultant, and find out where, when, and with what group(s) the prospective community worker has been involved. You will then be able to learn more even if from another city.

In the meantime (and the same applies to ANY community worker) you must make absolutely sure that he or she works under the direction of your group, and does the work your group wants him to do. He (or she, of course) must report back to your group, not to somewhere else giving you no control. Most good community workers DO work this way, and will appreciate you 'laying it on the line.' That's just the way they would want it to be.

## 5. CONCLUSION

This booklet cannot attempt to tell you everything about citizen and community groups.

It is hoped that you have received from it some basic ideas with which you can get started. By participating in a citizen group you are taking part in our democratic society in a meaningful way. The introduction said you would run into frustrations – and you will, but they are outweighed by many rewarding experiences.

“Citizenship” will be to you, and your group, something more than an expression or a piece of paper; whatever the nature of your group, each member may rightfully feel that his community, city, province, and country have received benefit from every effort – no matter how small.

## APPENDIX "A"

### Sample Constitution Clauses

The following suggestions have been put, as far as possible, into everyday language. They are adequate for most unincorporated groups. If your group plans to incorporate, a legal advisor should be consulted.

Start by stating the name of the organization, and who may join:

The name of the organization shall be the Harvest Heights Community Association, and it shall be comprised of such persons who reside in the Harvest Heights area and who have paid the required membership fee.

Then give the purpose of the group:

The Association shall be operated in a manner so as to bring the greatest possible benefit to area residents in the fields of health, recreation, general education, and social welfare.

The Association shall try to encourage the idea of citizen participation in community affairs.

The Association shall be a vehicle for collective action on matters of concern to its members.

If the group is to have officers (or executives), states how many, their titles, and how often they should be elected:

Annually, during the months of . . . . or . . . ., or at the first opportunity thereafter, the following officers shall be elected by the membership: Chairman, two vice-chairmen, secretary and treasurer. These five officers shall form the executive committee of the Association.

State what the membership fee is to be:

There shall be a membership fee of one dollar per family per calendar year, payable in advance.

and then, who is to control Association money:

All funds belonging or entrusted to the Association shall be under the control of the Treasurer, who will present a statement of accounts to the membership (quarterly annually). All funds shall be deposited in a financial institution which is a member of the Canada Deposit Insurance Corporation, and the signatures of the Treasurer and any one other officer shall be required to withdraw funds.

You may then wish to restrict spending large sums:

All expenditures over (fifty dollars) shall be submitted to the general membership for prior approval.

Many groups like to include a clear statement about affiliations:

The Association may in no way be connected with, or affiliated with any single political party, religious institution or commercial enterprise. It may establish desired relationships with other citizen or community organizations that have no partisan political, religious or commercial affiliation, provided that no controls are imposed on the Association.

A group should always specify how future additions or amendments may be made to its constitution:

This constitution may be amended by simple majority vote at any Annual General Meeting.

And the final point, to allow for dissolution when the group is no longer functioning:

The Executive Committee may, at its discretion dissolve the Association if its members believe it no longer serves any purpose, with any funds left on hand (state disposal).

Other items could of course be included — these are basics providing minimum structure. If you wish more, ask some other groups for copies of their constitution or by-laws for further ideas.











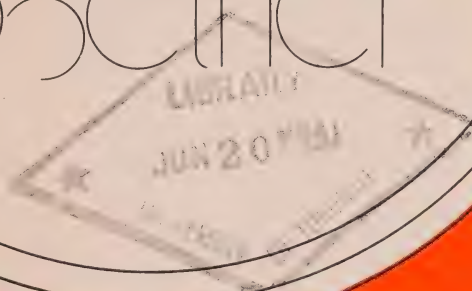


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# Getting People Together



TABLE OF CONTENTS

	PAGE
1. INTRODUCTION .....	1
2. GETTING TOGETHER .....	3
The Initial Contact Group .....	4
The Founding Committee .....	5
Building on the Founding Committee .....	5
The Constitution Committee .....	6
Temporary Executive .....	6
Where to Hold Meetings? .....	7
When to Meet? .....	8
Planning The First Public Meeting .....	8
Adjustments Under “Crisis” Conditions .....	12
Decision-Making .....	13
3. STAYING TOGETHER .....	14
What About Money .....	14
Sources of Assistance .....	15
Alternative Sources .....	17
When to Quit .....	17
4. SOME OF THE MORE TECHNICAL QUESTIONS .....	19
Structure or Be Free .....	19
Communications and Publicity .....	21
Involving More People .....	23
Relationships with Other Groups .....	25
Gathering Information .....	26
The Role of the Community Worker .....	27
5. CONCLUSION .....	28
APPENDIX A	
Sample Constitution Clauses .....	29





## 1. INTRODUCTION

This revised booklet, originally written in 1970 by Mr. P. G. Green, has been revised & republished in response to many requests made to the Ministry of Culture and Recreation regarding assistance in the establishment and development of community or neighbourhood groups. The following pages are intended only to serve as a general guide and should not be regarded as the final answer in organizing your group.

The past several years have seen a great increase in the involvement of people in the life of their community. No matter what you see as the reason for forming a group, you are not alone — thousands of Canadians have. Most of them with interests similar to yours will be happy to help or communicate with you. A *Directory of Community Groups in Ontario* has been recently published by the Ministry which will help you locate them.

## 2. GETTING TOGETHER

There is only one simple requirement for starting a group — people must see a need for it.

The initial organization can play a vital role in how the organization or group develops, and how effective it is in meeting its purposes. Some groups form gradually over a period of several weeks, while others are created to meet a special need when time is of the essence.

Groups formed over a longer time usually have the greatest long-term impact on people.

Even when working in a rush, it is wise to know how most groups get off the ground. An outline of how many Ontario groups have begun is therefore followed by some suggestions for adjustments that can be made under 'crisis' conditions.

Some questions should first be answered by anyone thinking about starting a group:—

### (1) WHAT IS IT FOR?

Apart from the overall benefits of involvement in a community, what are likely to be the purposes and objectives around which people will form a group?

### (2) WHAT WILL IT DO?

The initiators of a group should have some ideas or suggestions about what a new group could do to meet a need. The membership must, however, make all the final decisions. The impact of many people working together is so great that the thinking becomes "what WE want" instead of "what THEY want."

### (3) WHO IS LIKELY TO JOIN IT?

Is it to be local neighbourhood group or a geographically wider community of interest? Can it provide incentive for potential members to join?

#### (4) IS A NEW GROUP REALLY NEEDED FOR THIS PURPOSE?

Does one already exist? It is wise to look and ask around before starting a new group. You might end up in competition with one that has exactly the same objectives for the same people. There are times when a new group is necessary, when an old one has stagnated, but you would be very wise to find out whether you might be further ahead to revitalize an existing organization.

It is essential to be thinking clearly about the reasons for a new group, because people will soon be asking questions. Thoughtless answers can mean lost potential members, so to help you, the questions could also be restated another way.

(1) *What* do you want to do?

Why?

(2) *Who* do you want to do it?

Why?

(3) *When* do you want to do it?

Why?

(4) *How* do you want to do it?

Though these questions may seem childishly simple and perhaps even too basic, ask them of yourself and others. You may be surprised at some of the different answers you get from people you thought were all agreed. Then with brief, but clear and understandable answers to these questions ready, you have the beginning of a group.

#### THE INITIAL CONTACT GROUP

When you have sorted things out in your own mind, the next step is to find from four to a dozen other people who share your ideas. In a neighbourhood, this is easy if the concern you feel is widely reflected. Just talk to friends and neighbours. Some may be interested, but reluctant to "get involved." Remind them that no special talents are required. For example, if your concerns relate to children, staff at local schools might help, and parents of some of your own children's friends may share your ideas.

It's then a simple step to arrange an informal meeting at a convenient time and location when you have found the nucleus for a group. A private home is by far the best place for a relaxed, informal atmosphere. Talk over collectively your ideas.

## THE FOUNDING COMMITTEE

A 'Founding Committee' is really another name for a steering committee, but one which suggests less formalized structure. The name adequately defines the purpose.

The initial contact group may define itself as the 'Founding Committee' to initiate action, or it may try to arrange an open public meeting to see if additional people can be attracted at this stage.

The job of the Founding Committee is not to make a lot of decisions, but to seek out alternatives, to let people know the group is being formed, and to present firm suggestions about how it should proceed. Depending on the size of the group, the founding committee can, if that amount of formality is desired, also perform the functions of the 'Constitution Committee'. (See section on Constitution Committee below.)

## BUILDING ON THE FOUNDING COMMITTEE

Members of the group tend to recommend themselves by their own interest in the early stages, but many groups like to start letting people know they exist. A stampede doesn't often result, but some additional support can be added.

If the group is to serve a small well-defined district, a church or school in the area may be willing to help reproduce a leaflet describing the ambitions of the new group, and perhaps suggesting an informal meeting for anyone interested.

The first meeting a group holds is a very important one.

If an informal meeting is desired, a small room in a central location is best. Arrangements can usually be made for the use of a staff lounge at a school or a small meeting room at a church. Have more available, but don't put out more than about twenty chairs. However optimistic you may feel, it is always better psychologically to have to add additional chairs than to have a few people scattered among a hundred empty seats.

## THE CONSTITUTION COMMITTEE

As mentioned above, the functions of this short-term committee can quite easily be served by the founding (or steering) committee, or by the temporary executive. This is especially so if it is a very small group. However, if your first contact group feels a constitution is needed, and enough people are available and interested, it is far better to get them actively contributing right from the start. Avoid having a small group doing all the work unless no one else is presently available. To maintain their interest, some people might be invited to develop the constitution for the group. (Most groups have some informal statement of purpose or intent, but many others still like a formal constitution.)

The need and relative benefits of having or not having a constitution are discussed in Part. IV. Here, it is enough to suggest that if the group intends to handle any funds it is usually considered to be beneficial to have a constitution that includes directions for control of group moneys.

Some sample clauses for citizen group constitutions are included in an appendix at the back of this booklet.

The constitution committee should try to have proposals for the group constitution ready to present to the founding meeting for approval. Sometimes, changes are voted, additions or deletions are made by the membership, and the committee has to incorporate such changes in the final constitution. Once this job is completed, the constitution committee is disbanded, and its members go on to other activities. The committee can always be revived if there seems to be a need.

## TEMPORARY EXECUTIVE

There are two big reasons why a group's first executive committee should be appointed for a short term only.

In the first place, you will expect your group to grow and may make contact with interested and helpful people after it has started. You may want some of these people on your executive.

Even more important is the fact that, at the outset, people will know very few of those attending the meetings, and even a nodding acquaintance gives little idea as to how capable people may be in a certain role. Some of those elected may also be new to



citizen involvement, and find they would be happier if they didn't have the worry of a leadership role once they try it.

It is suggested, then, that it would be very wise to elect your first executive committee for about a three-month term to start with, then for a nine-month term, and annually thereafter.

Nearly all citizen groups have an "Executive Committee" or at least a group that performs the functions of one, but the name may sound terribly formal to you. If it does, change it to any name acceptable to your members, but make sure everyone knows what is expected of him.

## WHERE TO HOLD MEETINGS?

A neighbourhood or community type of group should try to find a location central to the area it wishes to serve. Many Ontario school boards are beginning to make school facilities available in the evenings without charge to worthwhile community organizations, and your local school authorities or trustees can advise you if this applies to your area.

Some churches are also willing to accommodate you, as long as the day and time you select does not conflict with any of their own meetings. You will find they often have to obtain approval of various boards or committees, so give them plenty of notice.

Many other possible places suggest themselves — libraries, union or legion halls, municipal buildings and so on.

Don't get carried away and book a room for which you have to pay a lot of money. You may find the payment coming from your own pocket. Also, don't book too large a room so those attending become 'lost' in it, or have to shout to be heard. For a small meeting, a lounge is usually better than an auditorium, and a cosy basement better than a huge Sunday School room.

Space is almost always available when you start looking around; in fact you'll probably be quite surprised at how helpful many people are once your group gets going.

A special interest group — for example, a city-wide group forming to work on pollution problems — should try to find a location as central as possible within the city to avoid having

anyone travel too far. Also, keep in mind that some of those who come may not be familiar with the district. If you have a choice, a location on a main road is preferable to a small side street. Try to give some simple directions, and find out ahead of time what the parking situation is like at the time you want to meet.

## **WHEN TO MEET?**

Most groups are best served by holding meetings in the evenings. Some, such as a women's coffee club or the "Take-a-Break" groups, have to meet in the daytime, as may some especially designed for shift workers. In general, however, evenings are best. Young children are in bed, and babysitting is usually available. Working people are also home after supper and may be attracted out for something worthwhile.

A commonly used starting time is 8 p.m., but keep in mind the interests of the people you hope to attract. For example, some may not want to give up an interesting hockey game on TV!

Not so long ago, Tuesdays and Thursdays were always considered good "meeting" nights. However, there are so many activities going on these days that some organizations find Mondays less competitive for people's time. Fridays are bad, being a common shopping night, entertainment night, or people may be off somewhere for a weekend. Weekends are generally disastrous except for occasional special events, but some groups are finding Sunday evenings increasingly acceptable.

## **PLANNING THE FIRST PUBLIC MEETING**

Many new groups have been extremely disappointed when, having finally got to the point of calling their first public meeting, only a handful of friends and relatives show up!

It is no longer enough to reserve space, stick a notice on a lamppost, and wait for everyone to arrive! Your first meeting must have particularly careful planning and publicity. Try to put yourself outside the area of being directly involved, and ask yourself: "Would I go to that meeting?", "Who's holding it?", "What's it for?", "Is it worth paying a babysitter?"

These are some of the questions that you have to answer before they are asked, in your pre-meeting publicity.

A lot may depend on what main issues you are organizing your group around. You can probably count on solid support from neighbours if it's because a developer wants to erect a high-rise apartment in your back yard!

If your 'thing' is to provide children's recreation or after school care, then of course all parents — especially working parents — have reason to be interested, and your local school may like to help with publicity. A group that has the desire to go into several fields of endeavour will likely start in a very small way, and grow more slowly than one with a big immediate issue to face, but that group will often be stronger and longer lasting for the slower growth under sound leadership.

When planning that all-important first meeting, therefore, you will find that most or all of the following points are worth considering:—

- (1) Try to set a *date* about three weeks ahead if you can. This will allow time to work on publicity.
- (2) Call or write your *local newspaper(s)* and *radio station(s)*, advising them about the meeting and why it is being called. Unless you want to avoid the press, invite them to the meeting. (Some groups are adamantly opposed to the presence of reporters, especially if they are to be engaged in some sort of "pressure" action. It takes experience to really decide when the press may be helpful but, as a general rule, they can help with publicity that is necessary to get your group off the ground.)
- (3) *Letters to the 'Editor'* about the main issues you wish to present can arouse interest in these issues before people hear about the meeting.
- (4) If your meeting concerns a local geographical area, *door-to-door newsletters* can help — but don't expect great results from these alone. Teenagers are often a big help with distribution and can do a very responsible job. If time permits, a knock at each door with personal delivery is much better, and gives you an opportunity to answer 'on-the-spot' questions.
- (5) Make sure your leaflet or newsletter contains *point of contact* — address and telephone number, with several names of

people in your group. This may encourage people to contact you, and will assure them that this is a local project started by their neighbours.

- (6) Remind all on your initial contact group, or committee, (and their wives and husbands) to *mention the proposed meeting to friends* and neighbours at every opportunity. Try to get a firm commitment from each contact.
- (7) About two weeks ahead, ask *local ministers* to announce the meeting (and the reason for it) to their congregations.
- (8) Try to arrange for *a well-known guest* to be at your meeting to speak briefly and perhaps answer some questions. It does not have to be a nationally famous figure, but someone known and respected locally or whose name has been in the news about the issue(s) in which you are interested. Some may come to hear this guest who might not otherwise have shown interest.
- (9) Ensure your publicity mentions the *name* of that person, and the reason, if possible, why he or she will attend (i.e. to speak on pollution, etc.).
- (10) Avoid any temptation to pad out the program with someone's home movies of last summer's trip to Vancouver. *A short brisk meeting* that stays on the subject at hand will encourage people to come back. Those who feel they would have been better to stay in front of their TV sets may never come back.
- (11) If you can, try to arrange for coffee and *refreshments* — usually cookies or doughnuts are enough. This will encourage people to stay around after the formal meeting. They will get to know each other, and increase the possibility of adding to your action group.
- (12) *Recognize that not everyone is "action-oriented."* If your group plans a militant or activist program, try to include something for those who, for whatever reason, prefer a more sedate life. This will broaden your membership base, and also improve your chances for later success.
- (13) Select a *chairman* for your first meeting with great care. If the chairman of the steering committee, or founding com-



mittee, has had little experience or still lacks confidence, it may be wise to invite a guest chairman for the evening. Make yourself available to him (her) well before the meeting — at his convenience — so that he understands exactly what you are trying to do. This could be a chairman of another local group, a minister or priest, a member of the Legislature or local municipal politician, or someone from one of the organizations listed under “Sources of Assistance.” Your group chairman or president would introduce the guest chairman to the meeting, and get the feel of how to run future meetings. In some cases, people are coming together to generally talk over their concerns. In this case a chairman might not be needed.

- (14) To start the meeting, either present those who come with a *written background* of why you felt it necessary to call the meeting or explain why it was felt a citizen group was needed.
- (15) Make sure that someone in your group will be prepared to take *notes* (or ‘minutes’).
- (16) Plan a meeting of the group leaders or elected committee as soon as possible after the first meeting to start on the *follow-up*.
- (17) Before *closing* the meeting, make sure everyone knows what has been decided, and what is to happen next. Your chairman can be asked to help by summing up at the close. Always set a date — even if approximate — for a follow-up.
- (18) *Always be guided by what has come out of the meeting*, especially by a vote. It is easy for the organizers to feel they know better than those attending and there is often a temptation to go ahead in their own way regardless. This can only result in no local support, and no group. It may even cause the formation of an opposing organization.
- (19) You may want to have a *committee, or executive*, elected; if so, do it near the end of the meeting as many attending may be strangers. They will want an opportunity to hear different people’s views before voting. **AT THIS MEETING — AND THIS MEETING ONLY — CONCENTRATE ON THE ISSUES FIRST AND THE PEOPLE LATER.** By issues, this includes issues as they affect people, but ever afterwards con-



sider people first. THIS IS THE PARTIAL EXCEPTION TO THE GENERAL RULE.

- (20) Be equipped with pens and sheets of lined paper or a cheap exercise book, and ask those attending to *register with name, address and telephone number*. You can then be sure of getting back to those individuals with any follow-up notices.

## ADJUSTMENTS UNDER “CRISIS” CONDITIONS

A group that is forming to resolve an immediate problem, of whatever kind, has to be able to organize very quickly. It often cannot follow the procedures outlined here simply because time does not permit. A meeting has to be called very quickly, wherever space can be hastily arranged. Notice of meeting will likely be by word of mouth — you hope to get as many as possible to start, and that others will hear or be contacted to join in later. Functions like founding committees, constitutions, and so on can wait until the action is under way to meet the crisis.

Your first meeting will likely be devoted almost entirely to a discussion of what options are available. Don't forget however, that it will still be necessary to provide some background information for some people before they can contribute effectively. (Remember the questions on Page 3 and 4.) Action-oriented resource people will help as long as they are content to remain in an advisory capacity and not try to dictate the action. This is often difficult for someone wholly geared to action.

Some 'crisis' groups get into arguments about who is supposed to be speaking on their behalf. It is wise to decide early on, who is to handle press releases, who will try to get the issue raised on TV or radio news if that applies, and who is to contact the necessary authorities (Councils, Governments, etc.).

Over enthusiastic members of the group can often be impetuous and go ahead on their own to the detriment of the group.

Research material can be expensive, and almost impossible for a group to obtain on short notice. Some bodies, like social planning councils, have archives full of research material on a variety of subjects, and some of these may help. Most groups, however, stay on “PEOPLE” problems rather than research. If the issue is big enough, others with more funds and staff at their disposal will pick up on the research. Make sure they know of your group, and

that the group has an opportunity to feed information into the research body. This will increase the likelihood of the research findings supporting your stand.

Having formed a group to meet a need, you will have to decide whether to meet this one need only, or to continue (see on 'When to Quit'). This will also help you decide how much structure the group requires.

Handling an immediate issue is really a subject in itself, and will not be covered in greater detail here. Use your own discretion about obtaining help from the 'Sources of assistance' list.

## **DECISION-MAKING**

Volumes have been written about the best method of decision-making. Some people feel that decisions should be made at the top by the chairman or executive committee. Others say that the members make the decisions and that the executive carry them out. There are also many variations between these choices.

The type of decision-making you will have will depend upon your members and the objectives of the group. So, keep the organization flexible until you can see what method best helps the group meet its objective.

### 3. STAYING TOGETHER

This section assumes that the group is well off the ground, and instead of being in the founding stages, it must turn its attention to the art of staying together.

#### WHAT ABOUT MONEY?

A group that is being formed solely for discussion purposes can operate very efficiently on very little money. Coffee and snacks may be provided at meetings, but dimes or quarters from those present can purchase supplies for the next get-together.

However, this is an exception — most groups need *some* money. At the beginning their estimates of their needs are often greatly exaggerated but, as the group gains knowledge and experience, it finds many things available free for the asking. This applies especially to local community association.

The fact still remains that many multi-purpose groups, and some single-purpose groups, need money to get off the ground. If they don't find a way to raise it, there's a good chance the group won't continue for long — or if it does, it won't be as effective as it might be.

A word of caution, then. Although money may seem all-important to you in your early plans (and it may be that you are right), it is a question which you would be wise to talk over thoroughly amongst yourselves, and seek advice and opinions from others.

If you decide your group does need money, you then have to decide how to raise it.

Membership fees can help you get started, but the amount raised is not generally enough to do very much. Also, if the membership fee is set too high in order to raise money, people may balk at joining an unknown organization that charges a substantial fee. A person may risk a dollar or two, but often won't chance five dollars, at least until the group has proved itself.

Some groups have dispensed with fees altogether. All residents of a stated area are automatically entitled to the benefits of mem-

bership, perhaps by simply signing a statement of interest in the group. This can really generate interest when people can find out about a group without risking any money, but it doesn't help the group treasury.

Fortunately, there are increasing sources of funds available to citizen organizations. The Ontario Government has recognized the need for some funding to help groups get started, and is often prepared to help a group. Depending on your program plans, other organizations or levels of government may be prepared to help. There are some private foundations that take an interest, especially in some kind of innovative service, and some Federal Government departments will assist a project.

Most bodies, private or government, have certain criteria your group must meet in order to receive a grant. This is only to be expected as they are handling either public or trust funds.

You may also locate your own source of funds. The only caution is to see that there are no strings attached that could inhibit your group in what it wants to achieve.

The Ministry of Culture and Recreation publishes a booklet which lists a variety of resources available to community groups; not only financial assistance but also consultative and staff resources, printed and audio-visual aids, speakers and other types of information useful to groups and individuals concerned about making their community a better place to live. This book is available from the Multicultural Development Branch of the Ministry at Queen's Park, and in the Ontario Government Bookstore, 880 Bay Street, Toronto.

In addition, there is a series of booklets available from the Ministry entitled "Notes for Community Leaders" with titles such as: Effective Meetings, Speaking in Public, Leaders and Members, Publicity and Public Relations, and Community Organizations.

## **SOURCES OF ASSISTANCE (and what to expect from each)**

Several references have been made to the fact that help IS available to you on request.

The sources vary from one district to another, but one or more of the following are usually available to you at no charge:



Most ministries of the ONTARIO GOVERNMENT employ staff persons who will assist you on request. These consultants may be especially helpful in providing basic information, directing the group to various sources of assistance, and so on. An amazing variety of types of resources are available free to individuals and groups. All you have to do is ask!

Many *SOCIAL PLANNING COUNCILS* around the Province employ some first-rate people who will be glad to help you if they can. These organizations also have "volunteer" arms, which are like any other citizen organization. However, the volunteers come from all areas and backgrounds, and *may* not be conversant with the citizen-group scene in any particular locality. Staff hours are generally nine to five, but we have yet to hear of a staff person refusing to help a group in an evening if asked.

There are, of course, many *SOCIAL AGENCIES* such as Information Centres and Volunteer Bureaux which provide a variety of services to the community. They may be able to assist you from their general knowledge, or put you in touch with someone more knowledgeable than themselves.

Smaller communities that do not have social planning councils or similar organizations sometimes have *UNITED COMMUNITY SERVICES*, and some employ staff in functions similar to the planning councils in larger centres.

Another valuable source of help is through *FEDERATED OR UMBRELLA CITIZENS' GROUPS*. These are, of course, all volunteers — people just like you who have been through the mill and know where "things are at". They may offer advice and assistance from their own experience and will usually recognize the problems you are facing.

Finally, do not overlook the possibility of help from a group a few blocks away from you. It is not always easy to identify a group, or to locate its leaders — usually it's a question of asking around. Such a group, close to your own location, probably shares some of the same problems and will often be glad to help. In any event, its members will appreciate the knowledge that you have started a group, and what you hope to do.



## ALTERNATIVE SOURCES

Many churches and ministers will help; they often have plenty of organizational experiences. The same applies to local elected representatives and municipal officials who could provide groups with information on the appropriate department to contact for maps, studies or reports.

An additional community resource is the community college or university. Often groups will find faculty persons interested in their areas of concern and willing to provide information or professional assistance of some nature. In this way resources ranging from expertise to volunteer researchers and meeting space could be made available.

Some people may present themselves as "Community Workers" but have little or no experience or training. Some of these undoubtedly well-intentioned people can do your group more harm than good, so be sure to check out the background if you consider approaching such a person, or are approached by one. Make sure they know what they are talking about.

## WHEN TO QUIT

Many groups will face the question, "Should we quit or carry on?" at some time in their existence — some face it quite frequently. Many groups form, in fact, around one issue only, and many have no need to continue after that.

Keep firmly in mind that there is no reflection on a group or its members if they decide the group no longer serves a purpose. It may be much better for active people involved in their community to move on to other challenges more deserving of their attention.

If the group has dwindled in numbers and enthusiasm to the point where it can no longer function, it is better to call a meeting of those still interested, and suggest a resolution to "kill" the organization. Either this will happen, or the ensuing discussion might suggest new endeavours that might be undertaken to revitalize the group.

Any money left on hand could be passed, if members agree, to another active organization working for an acceptable cause, given to a charity or medical research fund acceptable to your members, or deposited in a bank until some future issue requires the forma-

tion of a new group. If this is done, make sure all your group (and the bank, of course) know to whom the money could be paid and under what circumstances. If the amount is substantial, legal help might enable you to set up a trusteeship.

Current thinking suggests this is better than the old way some groups operated in the past — meeting an issue, then going into ‘limbo’ for a few years until something else required attention. When that happens, no one knows for sure if the organization still exists, and any new or potential group workers in a community are reluctant to start up a new group and perhaps tread on a lot of toes. Consequently, many opportunities for effective work are missed while everyone waits for someone else to “do something.”

Self-evaluation by a group should be a continuing thing, and when that evaluation says it’s time to quit, don’t fight it.

## 4. SOME OF THE MORE TECHNICAL QUESTIONS

The pages you have read so far should give a beginner some fair idea about how to form a group, and where to obtain help when it is wanted.

In the early days of your group, other questions may be raised and decisions may be faced that involve more than simply calling a group together and setting up a few meetings — questions about such technical sounding subject like “communications,” “structure,” “group relationships” and so on.

This last section will attempt to give you some ideas from the volunteer's point of view. It won't answer every question that arises, but will give some background information to help you find your own answers when the need arises.

### STRUCTURE OR BE FREE . . .

Some community groups seem to have been organized by the sort of people who are sticklers for every detail. They like to see a group's constitution or by-laws spell out everything to the maximum degree.

This is what is called a highly structured group — when everything is laid out in detail in an organization's rules and regulations. A perfect example might be your own Municipal Government, with all its committees, departments, and books full of by-laws necessary for it to function effectively. This is structure far in excess of the needs of a community group.

Most of us are reasonably familiar with this kind of structure, from observation if not experience, and even when we are organizing to meet one of these structured bodies, we tend to adopt the same kind of structure ourselves. It's often the only way we know.

On the other hand, a group might meet up with a recent university graduate who says, “Structure? What do you need structure for?” and then proceeds to explain how a group can dispense with tools like constitutions, executive officers, committees, by-laws, and so on.

“You don’t need a chairman or president,” he may say — “simply rotate the duties among your membership.”

There is enough truth in these arguments to make them sound believable, and it is admitted that this unstructured organization will be suitable for some groups: not only a debating club, but perhaps a council of local organizations sharing information, even if the local organizations are really committees of a handful of people. Each group could supply a chairman in rotation, and make its own notes of items of interest. Open forum groups, which may discuss issues but pass no resolutions and take no action, are another example.

For the majority of citizen groups — especially those handling money or engaging in ‘action’ of some kind, the totally unstructured set-up can be highly dangerous. It provides no restriction on who is to handle the group’s funds, and how; it makes it even more difficult to establish control over highly enthusiastic members who insist on going their own way regardless of group opinion. It also fails to provide a formalized basis for settling disputes among members.

It might also be added that the use of money by a group is one of the most frequent sources of discontent amongst members of that group.

One final hazard of the unstructured group is that it is more open to the smooth-talking individual who sees the group as a vehicle to be used for some hidden purpose — good or bad. When this happens, it is not until most of the original membership has left that someone asks, “What went wrong?”

Too much structure, on the other hand, can inhibit the group in a different way. If the purpose of the organization is detailed in the constitution as, “To organize and present objections to there-zoning of . . . area.” then the group has given itself no mandate for future work on problems connected with day care in the area, youth activities, local pollution, or anything else.

The group could work on the same original project, and leave the future much more flexible if the constitution were to state instead:

“The purpose of . . . organization is to bring the greatest possible benefit to area residents in the fields of health, recreation, general education and social welfare.”

This sort of wording allows the group to do anything reasonable and still be free to face some future issue or crisis.

Many groups seem to have found the right balance between too much structure, and none at all; a new group should try to leave some provision for changes in its constitution at fairly frequent intervals as it grows in experience.

It is suggested that new groups, desiring some structure, limit the formality to an outline of the purpose of the group, control of money, duties and terms of its leaders, and future dissolution. It is always easier to add more when the group needs it, than it is to remove structure once it has been created.

## COMMUNICATIONS AND PUBLICITY

Most groups need publicity at some time, either to reach out to potential new members, to advise the community at large about concerns or activities of the group, or to gain support around an issue.

At the same time, several groups have felt that the press has ‘used’ them, or their activities, only for sensationalism. Thus they become very reluctant to contact the media.

Consequently it may be wise to take note of how your local media handles citizen group news. Don’t forget that citizen groups are new to you, and may be new to the media people as well — they may simply not understand what you are doing or what you are trying to achieve.

It does seem reasonable to comment that the press will often give much more coverage to a sit-in or demonstration than it will to the constructive and on-going activities of most groups that may be rather less sensational, although equally or perhaps more worthwhile.

When your group wishes to advise the news media about a matter, the usual method is by a “Press release.”



This is a written statement by the group about the subject, and should advise the editor “WHO-WHAT-WHY-WHEN-WHERE.” It should also include the name and address of the sending group, and a contact person and telephone number for use if more information is required by the paper.

The press release should always be double-spaced, typewritten one side of a page only, with a wide margin on both sides. Try to use only one page if possible, and give the editor a clear indication when he has reached the end of the item. This is traditionally done by typing –30– two or three lines below the final line. Miss out on any of these suggestions, and you increase the risk that your press release will end up in the wastebasket.

Keep in your own mind, when sending a press release, that what seems to you to be a big story may not be so to a busy news editor. If you have the opportunity for a personal contact, take the release to the paper(s) in person.

Radio, and sometimes even TV should not be overlooked as useful media, either for press releases or public service announcements about forthcoming public meetings. Many stations are happy to co-operate if your group gives them fair notice.

Many groups remember the need for communication, or publicity, outside their membership or area, but sometimes overlook the even more important need to communicate with members and potential members of the group.

There are various ways to do this – one of the most effective is the periodic group newsletter. This is especially useful to a neighbourhood, community, or cultural group engaged in many different activities.

Internal communications can be seen as an important way of advertising. It’s often not enough to put a message across only once – it should be done several times (if possible) to reach everyone. Each member of a group engaged in many functions, may be familiar with only a few of them.

Seek out your own method of communicating – newsletters, a local news column in the weekly press, public meetings, word of mouth whenever possible, perhaps a system of area representatives each serving one block or one floor of an apartment building.

Your area representatives can also help with the distribution of notices or newsletter, and carry feed-back as well. This is most important.

Effective communications must be two-way communications. It's not enough for an executive committee to advise the membership about all the good work it is doing. It must have the ability to hear what people are saying in the area or membership, and it must be able to respond.

Good two-way communications will help to hold the group together, make it a viable and effective organization, and promote the ideal of frequent self-evaluation.

## INVOLVING MORE PEOPLE

Think about some of the more critical comments you may have heard from some people involved in citizen groups:

"The apathy around here is appalling"

"Our committee has to do everything"

"They all want the benefits, but no-one wants to help"

"We had several meetings, but hardly anyone came"

"We haven't had elections because no-one wants to run for office"

"People only come out if it's a big issue"

Any of these sound familiar? Are they valid complaints?

Let's look at some realities!

There is apathy in many areas, but not as much as some people think. Many individuals are concerned, but have little knowledge to work from and are scared they might make themselves look silly. Some also fear retribution from some source or other. Many have grown up in an atmosphere of 'keep cool — don't get involved' or 'the experts know best.' These people need encouragement to participate and state their opinions.

A committee that 'has to do everything' often does so because it **WANTS** to do everything. Committee members feel a sense of their own importance, and feel they can do a better job anyway.

Not so. People very seldom volunteer for a job, but some would love to be asked!

No-one wants to help? One can't expect a mother of four or five young children to devote three evenings a week to supervising a drop-in centre. Nor can a man who works shift commit himself for regular attendance at anything, but **MOST** people are willing to take a share within their own capability. The more people your group has working, the less each individual has to do and the stronger the group becomes.

If people don't come to meetings, it may be because they didn't know about it, or didn't get enough notice to make suitable baby-sitting arrangements, had a prior commitment, or perhaps the topic under discussion was not of sufficient interest. Make sure your organization's meetings are interesting, and give everyone there a chance to participate. Everyone likes to believe his own opinions and views are important, and in a community group, they *are* important.

When nobody will run for office in an organization, it may be because those in office have taken too much on themselves and no one person will take it all over; it may be because they feel enmity might be caused with those gaining personal satisfaction from holding the office; it may also be **BECAUSE NO ONE EVER ASKED**, personally and sincerely!

People will come out for a big issue, because they recognize how it will affect them, and their lives or families. You don't get hundreds at any meeting, but careful publicity might point out how important a subject really is when people hadn't given it much thought before. An example might be the issue of pollution, almost unheard of a few years ago. This goes to show how very important your pre-meeting publicity is.

No one has yet found the whole answer to getting people involved, but a well-run group who can sincerely offer an invitation and a purpose will have the most success. Just remember (it cannot be over-emphasized) — we all like to feel that we count for something and that our personal views are important. When group leaders recognize this, they are on the way to having a well-supported group.

One word of warning. Don't get too carried away!

Some complaints have been heard about a group executive committee that tries to hand off everything, refusing to do even its own job. They, too, might wonder why more people don't get involved!

## RELATIONSHIPS WITH OTHER GROUPS

As your group gets itself organized, it will undoubtedly run into difficulties that seem, at first sight, insurmountable. As suggested in earlier sections, quite often a group that has been going longer can help.

Even beyond that, while many of the projects your group work on will be strictly local projects, there will also be times when you want to work on something that affects a borough, a whole city, a province, or even all Canada! For example, your group might want to start a day care centre, but isn't day care a national, or at the very least, a provincial problem? Many others must support your concerns. Your group might be organizing around a proposed zoning change, but won't that change also affect other communities around you? Pollution, while sometimes local in nature, is by no means a local problem only; neither is education, adult or children's.

You will therefore need to know who has groups going around you in the same general area, the same city, province, and so on. You may find several groups all sharing similar concerns, and collective action with them can not only save your members time and duplicated effort, but it may be also very much more effective if many groups co-operate.

Your group may be very well advised to affiliate with the 'umbrella' group of its choice — whichever seems closest to meeting your need. When doing so, make sure that your group remains independent and autonomous (self-governing), and that it will be consulted fully before any decisions are made in its name. Most umbrella organizations are quite careful about this, but it pays to be sure. Check to see what (if anything) is required of your group, and what your group is offered.

Just as within your own group, member organizations within an umbrella body will receive as much as they put into it.

Having made your choice, select your representatives, and be sure to make provision at your own meetings for them to report



back to you about what is happening elsewhere. It makes no sense to be gathering information if no one in the group gets to hear it.

Many organizations don't realize the fact, especially at the early stages of their development, but many similar problems face folk festival groups, cultural groups, welfare rights groups and businessmen's associations, arts and crafts groups, food co-operatives drop-in centres and community school groups. When they all get together, citizen involvement will be a powerful tool indeed.

When you have gathered available information about the possible umbrella organizations with which your group might affiliate, it is wise to put the matter before your full membership rather than treat it as an executive decision only. Inter-group co-operation requires, at times, more than just a present committee, and potential future leaders should know what is going on. Make your recommendations, but, as in all things, allow the group to make the final decision knowing all relevant facts.

## **GATHERING INFORMATION**

Part of your relationship with other groups will be an in-flow of information useful to your group, and an awareness of "know-how" that might otherwise take months to develop. Depending on your special interests, your sources of information need not stop there.

A single-purpose organization can usually identify sources of information about its special interest simply by reading and listening.

A group formed for many different purposes has to go much further afield, and into a much wider range of subjects.

Affiliation of at least one member of the group to other organizations can result in many leads to information when needed, or can add sources and contacts which are always good to have.

Futhermore, as many of your group as possible should get to know your local school trustee(s), alderman(men), provincial and federal members of parliament, school principal(s), local church clergy, and the staff of local newspapers. The local elected representatives are available and willing to help you with information about resources available and any concerns you may have.



Leaders, at least, should become familiar with both government and private services available in the community:— libraries, information centres, cultural, recreational, day care, emergency home-help services, services for pensioners, etc. Sooner or later, someone in your group will need such information.

**THE WHOLE PROCESS OF COLLECTING INFORMATION USEFUL TO YOUR GROUP SHOULD NEVER CEASE.**

## **THE ROLE OF THE COMMUNITY WORKER**

When you feel you need professional assistance, there are several 'consultant' services available to your group without charge. Generally speaking, these consultants, who will meet with you at your request on a matter of specific concern to you, are dedicated people on whom you can rely.

"Community Development" is a popular phase, and all kinds and types of people are presenting themselves as 'community workers.' Some have neither field training — that is actually being involved within a group — nor academic training to qualify them for the job. Such people **MAY** do your group more harm than good. The biggest fear groups have is the so-called community worker who only wants to use the group for his or her own purpose.

Fortunately, these are pretty rare, but there is no central registry or source of information about such people to help you to identify which kind any individual may be. It is suggested that, if you have doubts, you should check with either a known or recommended consultant, and find out where, when, and with what group(s) the prospective community worker has been involved. You will then be able to learn more even if from another city.

In the meantime (and the same applies to **ANY** community worker) you must make absolutely sure that he or she works under the direction of your group, and does the work your group wants him to do. He (or she, of course) must report back to your group, not to somewhere else giving you no control. Most good community workers **DO** work this way, and will appreciate you 'laying it on the line.' That's just the way they would want it to be.

## 5. CONCLUSION

This booklet cannot attempt to tell you everything about citizen and community groups.

It is hoped that you have received from it some basic ideas with which you can get started. By participating in a citizen group you are taking part in our democratic society in a meaningful way. The introduction said you would run into frustrations — and you will, but they are outweighed by many rewarding experiences.

“Citizenship” will be to you, and your group, something more than an expression or a piece of paper; whatever the nature of your group, each member may rightfully feel that his community, city, province, and country have received benefit from every effort — no matter how small.

## APPENDIX "A"

### Sample Constitution Clauses

The following suggestions have been put, as far as possible, into everyday language. They are adequate for most unincorporated groups. If your group plans to incorporate, a legal advisor should be consulted.

Start by stating the name of the organization, and who may join:

The name of the organization shall be the Harvest Heights Community Association, and it shall be comprised of such persons who reside in the Harvest Heights area and who have paid the required membership fee.

Then give the purpose of the group:

The Association shall be operated in a manner so as to bring the greatest possible benefit to area residents in the fields of health, recreation, general education, and social welfare.

The Association shall try to encourage the idea of citizen participation in community affairs.

The Association shall be a vehicle for collective action on matters of concern to its members.

If the group is to have officers (or executives), states how many, their titles, and how often they should be elected:

Annually, during the months of . . . . or . . . ., or at the first opportunity thereafter, the following officers shall be elected by the membership: Chairman, two vice-chairmen, secretary and treasurer. These five officers shall form the executive committee of the Association.

State what the membership fee is to be:

There shall be a membership fee of one dollar per family per calendar year, payable in advance.

and then, who is to control Association money:

All funds belonging or entrusted to the Association shall be under the control of the Treasurer, who will present a statement of accounts to the membership (quarterly annually). All funds shall be deposited in a financial institution which is a member of the Canada Deposit Insurance Corporation, and the signatures of the Treasurer and any one other officer shall be required to withdraw funds.

You may then wish to restrict spending large sums:

All expenditures over (fifty dollars) shall be submitted to the general membership for prior approval.

Many groups like to include a clear statement about affiliations:

The Association may in no way be connected with, or affiliated with any single political party, religious institution or commercial enterprise. It may establish desired relationships with other citizen or community organizations that have no partisan political, religious or commercial affiliation, provided that no controls are imposed on the Association.

A group should always specify how future additions or amendments may be made to its constitution:

This constitution may be amended by simple majority vote at any Annual General Meeting.

And the final point, to allow for dissolution when the group is no longer functioning:

The Executive Committee may, at its discretion dissolve the Association if its members believe it no longer serves any purpose, with any funds left on hand (state disposal).

Other items could of course be included – these are basics providing minimum structure. If you wish more, ask some other groups for copies of their constitution or by-laws for further ideas.













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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

	PAGE
1. INTRODUCTION .....	1
2. GETTING TOGETHER .....	3
The Initial Contact Group .....	4
The Founding Committee .....	5
Building on the Founding Committee .....	5
The Constitution Committee .....	6
Temporary Executive .....	6
Where to Hold Meetings? .....	7
When to Meet? .....	8
Planning The First Public Meeting .....	8
Adjustments Under "Crisis" Conditions .....	12
Decision-Making .....	13
3. STAYING TOGETHER .....	14
What About Money .....	14
Sources of Assistance .....	15
Alternative Sources .....	17
When to Quit .....	17
4. SOME OF THE MORE TECHNICAL QUESTIONS .....	19
Structure or Be Free .....	19
Communications and Publicity .....	21
Involving More People .....	23
Relationships with Other Groups .....	25
Gathering Information .....	26
The Role of the Community Worker .....	27
5. CONCLUSION .....	28
APPENDIX A	
Sample Constitution Clauses .....	29





## 1. INTRODUCTION

This revised booklet, originally written in 1970 by Mr. P. G. Green, has been revised and republished in response to many requests made to the Ministry of Citizenship and Recreation regarding assistance in the establishment and development of community or neighbourhood groups. The following pages are intended only to serve as a general guide and should not be regarded as the final answer in organizing your group.

The past several years have seen a great increase in the involvement of people in the life of their community. No matter what you see as the reason for forming a group, you are not alone — thousands of Canadians have. Most of them with interests similar to yours will be happy to help or communicate with you. A *Directory of Community Groups in Ontario* has been recently published by the Ministry which will help you locate them.

## 2. GETTING TOGETHER

There is only one simple requirement for starting a group — people must see a need for it.

The initial organization can play a vital role in how the organization or group develops, and how effective it is in meeting its purposes. Some groups form gradually over a period of several weeks, while others are created to meet a special need when time is of the essence.

Groups formed over a longer time usually have the greatest long-term impact on people.

Even when working in a rush, it is wise to know how most groups get off the ground. An outline of how many Ontario groups have begun is therefore followed by some suggestions for adjustments that can be made under 'crisis' conditions.

Some questions should first be answered by anyone thinking about starting a group:—

### (1) WHAT IS IT FOR?

Apart from the overall benefits of involvement in a community, what are likely to be the purposes and objectives around which people will form a group?

### (2) WHAT WILL IT DO?

The initiators of a group should have some ideas or suggestions about what a new group could do to meet a need. The membership must, however, make all the final decisions. The impact of many people working together is so great that the thinking becomes "what WE want" instead of "what THEY want."

### (3) WHO IS LIKELY TO JOIN IT?

Is it to be local neighbourhood group or a geographically wider community of interest? Can it provide incentive for potential members to join?

#### (4) IS A NEW GROUP REALLY NEEDED FOR THIS PURPOSE?

Does one already exist? It is wise to look and ask around before starting a new group. You might end up in competition with one that has exactly the same objectives for the same people. There are times when a new group is necessary, when an old one has stagnated, but you would be very wise to find out whether you might be further ahead to revitalize an existing organization.

It is essential to be thinking clearly about the reasons for a new group, because people will soon be asking questions. Thoughtless answers can mean lost potential members, so to help you, the questions could also be restated another way.

##### (1) *What* do you want to do?

Why?

##### (2) *Who* do you want to do it?

Why?

##### (3) *When* do you want to do it?

Why?

##### (4) *How* do you want to do it?

Though these questions may seem childishly simple and perhaps even too basic, ask them of yourself and others. You may be surprised at some of the different answers you get from people you thought were all agreed. Then with brief, but clear and understandable answers to these questions ready, you have the beginning of a group.

### THE INITIAL CONTACT GROUP

When you have sorted things out in your own mind, the next step is to find from four to a dozen other people who share your ideas. In a neighbourhood, this is easy if the concern you feel is widely reflected. Just talk to friends and neighbours. Some may be interested, but reluctant to "get involved." Remind them that no special talents are required. For example, if your concerns relate to children, staff at local schools might help, and parents of some of your own children's friends may share your ideas.

It's then a simple step to arrange an informal meeting at a convenient time and location when you have found the nucleus for a group. A private home is by far the best place for a relaxed, informal atmosphere. Talk over collectively your ideas.

## **THE FOUNDING COMMITTEE**

A 'Founding Committee' is really another name for a steering committee, but one which suggests less formalized structure. The name adequately defines the purpose.

The initial contact group may define itself as the 'Founding Committee' to initiate action, or it may try to arrange an open public meeting to see if additional people can be attracted at this stage.

The job of the Founding Committee is not to make a lot of decisions, but to seek out alternatives, to let people know the group is being formed, and to present firm suggestions about how it should proceed. Depending on the size of the group, the founding committee can, if that amount of formality is desired, also perform the functions of the 'Constitution Committee'. (See section on Constitution Committee below.)

## **BUILDING ON THE FOUNDING COMMITTEE**

Members of the group tend to recommend themselves by their own interest in the early stages, but many groups like to start letting people know they exist. A stampede doesn't often result, but some additional support can be added.

If the group is to serve a small well-defined district, a church or school in the area may be willing to help reproduce a leaflet describing the ambitions of the new group, and perhaps suggesting an informal meeting for anyone interested.

The first meeting a group holds is a very important one.

If an informal meeting is desired, a small room in a central location is best. Arrangements can usually be made for the use of a staff lounge at a school or a small meeting room at a church. Have more available, but don't put out more than about twenty chairs. However optimistic you may feel, it is always better psychologically to have to add additional chairs than to have a few people scattered among a hundred empty seats.

## THE CONSTITUTION COMMITTEE

As mentioned above, the functions of this short-term committee can quite easily be served by the founding (or steering) committee, or by the temporary executive. This is especially so if it is a very small group. However, if your first contact group feels a constitution is needed, and enough people are available and interested, it is far better to get them actively contributing right from the start. Avoid having a small group doing all the work unless no one else is presently available. To maintain their interest, some people might be invited to develop the constitution for the group. (Most groups have some informal statement of purpose or intent, but many others still like a formal constitution.)

The need and relative benefits of having or not having a constitution are discussed in Part. IV. Here, it is enough to suggest that if the group intends to handle any funds it is usually considered to be beneficial to have a constitution that includes directions for control of group moneys.

Some sample clauses for citizen group constitutions are included in an appendix at the back of this booklet.

The constitution committee should try to have proposals for the group constitution ready to present to the founding meeting for approval. Sometimes, changes are voted, additions or deletions are made by the membership, and the committee has to incorporate such changes in the final constitution. Once this job is completed, the constitution committee is disbanded, and its members go on to other activities. The committee can always be revived if there seems to be a need.

## TEMPORARY EXECUTIVE

There are two big reasons why a group's first executive committee should be appointed for a short term only.

In the first place, you will expect your group to grow and may make contact with interested and helpful people after it has started. You may want some of these people on your executive.

Even more important is the fact that, at the outset, people will know very few of those attending the meetings, and even a nodding acquaintance gives little idea as to how capable people may be in a certain role. Some of those elected may also be new to



citizen involvement, and find they would be happier if they didn't have the worry of a leadership role once they try it.

It is suggested, then, that it would be very wise to elect your first executive committee for about a three-month term to start with, then for a nine-month term, and annually thereafter.

Nearly all citizen groups have an "Executive Committee" or at least a group that performs the functions of one, but the name may sound terribly formal to you. If it does, change it to any name acceptable to your members, but make sure everyone knows what is expected of him.

## WHERE TO HOLD MEETINGS?

A neighbourhood or community type of group should try to find a location central to the area it wishes to serve. Many Ontario school boards are beginning to make school facilities available in the evenings without charge to worthwhile community organizations, and your local school authorities or trustees can advise you if this applies to your area.

Some churches are also willing to accommodate you, as long as the day and time you select does not conflict with any of their own meetings. You will find they often have to obtain approval of various boards or committees, so give them plenty of notice.

Many other possible places suggest themselves — libraries, union or legion halls, municipal buildings and so on.

Don't get carried away and book a room for which you have to pay a lot of money. You may find the payment coming from your own pocket. Also, don't book too large a room so those attending become 'lost' in it, or have to shout to be heard. For a small meeting, a lounge is usually better than an auditorium, and a cosy basement better than a huge Sunday School room.

Space is almost always available when you start looking around; in fact you'll probably be quite surprised at how helpful many people are once your group gets going.

A special interest group — for example, a city-wide group forming to work on pollution problems — should try to find a location as central as possible within the city to avoid having



anyone travel too far. Also, keep in mind that some of those who come may not be familiar with the district. If you have a choice, a location on a main road is preferable to a small side street. Try to give some simple directions, and find out ahead of time what the parking situation is like at the time you want to meet.

## **WHEN TO MEET?**

Most groups are best served by holding meetings in the evenings. Some, such as a women's coffee club or the "Take-a-Break" groups, have to meet in the daytime, as may some especially designed for shift workers. In general, however, evenings are best. Young children are in bed, and babysitting is usually available. Working people are also home after supper and may be attracted out for something worthwhile.

A commonly used starting time is 8 p.m., but keep in mind the interests of the people you hope to attract. For example, some may not want to give up an interesting hockey game on TV!

Not so long ago, Tuesdays and Thursdays were always considered good "meeting" nights. However, there are so many activities going on these days that some organizations find Mondays less competitive for people's time. Fridays are bad, being a common shopping night, entertainment night, or people may be off somewhere for a weekend. Weekends are generally disastrous except for occasional special events, but some groups are finding Sunday evenings increasingly acceptable.

## **PLANNING THE FIRST PUBLIC MEETING**

Many new groups have been extremely disappointed when, having finally got to the point of calling their first public meeting, only a handful of friends and relatives show up!

It is no longer enough to reserve space, stick a notice on a lamppost, and wait for everyone to arrive! Your first meeting must have particularly careful planning and publicity. Try to put yourself outside the area of being directly involved, and ask yourself: "Would I go to that meeting?", "Who's holding it?", "What's it for?", "Is it worth paying a babysitter?"

These are some of the questions that you have to answer before they are asked, in your pre-meeting publicity.

A lot may depend on what main issues you are organizing your group around. You can probably count on solid support from neighbours if it's because a developer wants to erect a high-rise apartment in your back yard!

If your 'thing' is to provide children's recreation or after school care, then of course all parents — especially working parents — have reason to be interested, and your local school may like to help with publicity. A group that has the desire to go into several fields of endeavour will likely start in a very small way, and grow more slowly than one with a big immediate issue to face, but that group will often be stronger and longer lasting for the slower growth under sound leadership.

When planning that all-important first meeting, therefore, you will find that most or all of the following points are worth considering:—

- (1) Try to set a *date* about three weeks ahead if you can. This will allow time to work on publicity.
- (2) Call or write your *local newspaper(s)* and *radio station(s)*, advising them about the meeting and why it is being called. Unless you want to avoid the press, invite them to the meeting. (Some groups are adamantly opposed to the presence of reporters, especially if they are to be engaged in some sort of "pressure" action. It takes experience to really decide when the press may be helpful but, as a general rule, they can help with publicity that is necessary to get your group off the ground.)
- (3) *Letters to the 'Editor'* about the main issues you wish to present can arouse interest in these issues before people hear about the meeting.
- (4) If your meeting concerns a local geographical area, *door-to-door newsletters* can help — but don't expect great results from these alone. Teenagers are often a big help with distribution and can do a very responsible job. If time permits, a knock at each door with personal delivery is much better, and gives you an opportunity to answer 'on-the-spot' questions.
- (5) Make sure your leaflet or newsletter contains *point of contact* — address and telephone number, with several names of

people in your group. This may encourage people to contact you, and will assure them that this is a local project started by their neighbours.

- (6) Remind all on your initial contact group, or committee, (and their wives and husbands) to *mention the proposed meeting to friends* and neighbours at every opportunity. Try to get a firm commitment from each contact.
- (7) About two weeks ahead, ask *local ministers* to announce the meeting (and the reason for it) to their congregations.
- (8) Try to arrange for *a well-known guest* to be at your meeting to speak briefly and perhaps answer some questions. It does not have to be a nationally famous figure, but someone known and respected locally or whose name has been in the news about the issue(s) in which you are interested. Some may come to hear this guest who might not otherwise have shown interest.
- (9) Ensure your publicity mentions the *name* of that person, and the reason, if possible, why he or she will attend (i.e. to speak on pollution, etc.).
- (10) Avoid any temptation to pad out the program with someone's home movies of last summer's trip to Vancouver. *A short brisk meeting* that stays on the subject at hand will encourage people to come back. Those who feel they would have been better to stay in front of their TV sets may never come back.
- (11) If you can, try to arrange for coffee and *refreshments* – usually cookies or doughnuts are enough. This will encourage people to stay around after the formal meeting. They will get to know each other, and increase the possibility of adding to your action group.
- (12) *Recognize that not everyone is "action-oriented."* If your group plans a militant or activist program, try to include something for those who, for whatever reason, prefer a more sedate life. This will broaden your membership base, and also improve your chances for later success.
- (13) Select a *chairman* for your first meeting with great care. If the chairman of the steering committee, or founding com-

mittee, has had little experience or still lacks confidence, it may be wise to invite a guest chairman for the evening. Make yourself available to him (her) well before the meeting — at his convenience — so that he understands exactly what you are trying to do. This could be a chairman of another local group, a minister or priest, a member of the Legislature or local municipal politician, or someone from one of the organizations listed under “Sources of Assistance.” Your group chairman or president would introduce the guest chairman to the meeting, and get the feel of how to run future meetings. In some cases, people are coming together to generally talk over their concerns. In this case a chairman might not be needed.

- (14) To start the meeting, either present those who come with a *written background* of why you felt it necessary to call the meeting or explain why it was felt a citizen group was needed.
- (15) Make sure that someone in your group will be prepared to take *notes* (or ‘minutes’).
- (16) Plan a meeting of the group leaders or elected committee as soon as possible after the first meeting to start on the *follow-up*.
- (17) Before *closing* the meeting, make sure everyone knows what has been decided, and what is to happen next. Your chairman can be asked to help by summing up at the close. Always set a date — even if approximate — for a follow-up.
- (18) *Always be guided by what has come out of the meeting*, especially by a vote. It is easy for the organizers to feel they know better than those attending and there is often a temptation to go ahead in their own way regardless. This can only result in no local support, and no group. It may even cause the formation of an opposing organization.
- (19) You may want to have a *committee, or executive*, elected; if so, do it near the end of the meeting as many attending may be strangers. They will want an opportunity to hear different people’s views before voting. **AT THIS MEETING — AND THIS MEETING ONLY — CONCENTRATE ON THE ISSUES FIRST AND THE PEOPLE LATER.** By issues, this includes issues as they affect people, but ever afterwards con-



sider people first. THIS IS THE PARTIAL EXCEPTION TO THE GENERAL RULE.

- (20) Be equipped with pens and sheets of lined paper or a cheap exercise book, and ask those attending to *register with name, address and telephone number*. You can then be sure of getting back to those individuals with any follow-up notices.

## ADJUSTMENTS UNDER “CRISIS” CONDITIONS

A group that is forming to resolve an immediate problem, of whatever kind, has to be able to organize very quickly. It often cannot follow the procedures outlined here simply because time does not permit. A meeting has to be called very quickly, wherever space can be hastily arranged. Notice of meeting will likely be by word of mouth — you hope to get as many as possible to start, and that others will hear or be contacted to join in later. Functions like founding committees, constitutions, and so on can wait until the action is under way to meet the crisis.

Your first meeting will likely be devoted almost entirely to a discussion of what options are available. Don't forget however, that it will still be necessary to provide some background information for some people before they can contribute effectively. (Remember the questions on Page 3 and 4.) Action-oriented resource people will help as long as they are content to remain in an advisory capacity and not try to dictate the action. This is often difficult for someone wholly geared to action.

Some 'crisis' groups get into arguments about who is supposed to be speaking on their behalf. It is wise to decide early on, who is to handle press releases, who will try to get the issue raised on TV or radio news if that applies, and who is to contact the necessary authorities (Councils, Governments, etc.).

Over enthusiastic members of the group can often be impetuous and go ahead on their own to the detriment of the group.

Research material can be expensive, and almost impossible for a group to obtain on short notice. Some bodies, like social planning councils, have archives full of research material on a variety of subjects, and some of these may help. Most groups, however, stay on “PEOPLE” problems rather than research. If the issue is big enough, others with more funds and staff at their disposal will pick up on the research. Make sure they know of your group, and



that the group has an opportunity to feed information into the research body. This will increase the likelihood of the research findings supporting your stand.

Having formed a group to meet a need, you will have to decide whether to meet this one need only, or to continue (see on 'When to Quit'). This will also help you decide how much structure the group requires.

Handling an immediate issue is really a subject in itself, and will not be covered in greater detail here. Use your own discretion about obtaining help from the 'Sources of assistance' list.

## **DECISION-MAKING**

Volumes have been written about the best method of decision-making. Some people feel that decisions should be made at the top by the chairman or executive committee. Others say that the members make the decisions and that the executive carry them out. There are also many variations between these choices.

The type of decision-making you will have will depend upon your members and the objectives of the group. So, keep the organization flexible until you can see what method best helps the group meet its objective.

### 3. STAYING TOGETHER

This section assumes that the group is well off the ground, and instead of being in the founding stages, it must turn its attention to the art of staying together.

#### WHAT ABOUT MONEY?

A group that is being formed solely for discussion purposes can operate very efficiently on very little money. Coffee and snacks may be provided at meetings, but dimes or quarters from those present can purchase supplies for the next get-together.

However, this is an exception — most groups need *some* money. At the beginning their estimates of their needs are often greatly exaggerated but, as the group gains knowledge and experience, it finds many things available free for the asking. This applies especially to local community association.

The fact still remains that many multi-purpose groups, and some single-purpose groups, need money to get off the ground. If they don't find a way to raise it, there's a good chance the group won't continue for long — or if it does, it won't be as effective as it might be.

A word of caution, then. Although money may seem all-important to you in your early plans (and it may be that you are right), it is a question which you would be wise to talk over thoroughly amongst yourselves, and seek advice and opinions from others.

If you decide your group does need money, you then have to decide how to raise it.

Membership fees can help you get started, but the amount raised is not generally enough to do very much. Also, if the membership fee is set too high in order to raise money, people may balk at joining an unknown organization that charges a substantial fee. A person may risk a dollar or two, but often won't chance five dollars, at least until the group has proved itself.

Some groups have dispensed with fees altogether. All residents of a stated area are automatically entitled to the benefits of mem-

bership, perhaps by simply signing a statement of interest in the group. This can really generate interest when people can find out about a group without risking any money, but it doesn't help the group treasury.

Fortunately, there are increasing sources of funds available to citizen organizations. The Ontario Government has recognized the need for some funding to help groups get started, and is often prepared to help a group. Depending on your program plans, other organizations or levels of government may be prepared to help. There are some private foundations that take an interest, especially in some kind of innovative service, and some Federal Government departments will assist a project.

Most bodies, private or government, have certain criteria your group must meet in order to receive a grant. This is only to be expected as they are handling either public or trust funds.

You may also locate your own source of funds. The only caution is to see that there are no strings attached that could inhibit your group in what it wants to achieve.

The Ministry of Citizenship and Culture publishes a booklet which lists a variety of resources available to community groups; not only financial assistance but also consultative and staff resources, printed and audio-visual aids, speakers and other types of information useful to groups and individuals concerned about making their community a better place to live. This book is available from the Citizenship Development Branch of the Ministry at Queen's Park, and in the Ontario Government Bookstore, 880 Bay Street, Toronto.

In addition, there is a series of booklets available from the Ministry entitled "Notes for Community Leaders" with titles such as: Effective Meetings, Speaking in Public, Leaders and Members, Publicity and Public Relations, and Community Organizations.

## **SOURCES OF ASSISTANCE (and what to expect from each)**

Several references have been made to the fact that help IS available to you on request.

The sources vary from one district to another, but one or more of the following are usually available to you at no charge:

Most ministries of the ONTARIO GOVERNMENT employ staff persons who will assist you on request. These consultants may be especially helpful in providing basic information, directing the group to various sources of assistance, and so on. An amazing variety of types of resources are available free to individuals and groups. All you have to do is ask!

Many *SOCIAL PLANNING COUNCILS* around the Province employ some first-rate people who will be glad to help you if they can. These organizations also have "volunteer" arms, which are like any other citizen organization. However, the volunteers come from all areas and backgrounds, and *may* not be conversant with the citizen-group scene in any particular locality. Staff hours are generally nine to five, but we have yet to hear of a staff person refusing to help a group in an evening if asked.

There are, of course, many *SOCIAL AGENCIES* such as Information Centres and Volunteer Bureaux which provide a variety of services to the community. They may be able to assist you from their general knowledge, or put you in touch with someone more knowledgeable than themselves.

Smaller communities that do not have social planning councils or similar organizations sometimes have *UNITED COMMUNITY SERVICES*, and some employ staff in functions similar to the planning councils in larger centres.

Another valuable source of help is through *FEDERATED OR UMBRELLA CITIZENS' GROUPS*. These are, of course, all volunteers — people just like you who have been through the mill and know where "things are at". They may offer advice and assistance from their own experience and will usually recognize the problems you are facing.

Finally, do not overlook the possibility of help from a group a few blocks away from you. It is not always easy to identify a group, or to locate its leaders — usually it's a question of asking around. Such a group, close to your own location, probably shares some of the same problems and will often be glad to help. In any event, its members will appreciate the knowledge that you have started a group, and what you hope to do.



## ALTERNATIVE SOURCES

Many churches and ministers will help; they often have plenty of organizational experiences. The same applies to local elected representatives and municipal officials who could provide groups with information on the appropriate department to contact for maps, studies or reports.

An additional community resource is the community college or university. Often groups will find faculty persons interested in their areas of concern and willing to provide information or professional assistance of some nature. In this way resources ranging from expertise to volunteer researchers and meeting space could be made available.

Some people may present themselves as "Community Workers" but have little or no experience or training. Some of these undoubtedly well-intentioned people can do your group more harm than good, so be sure to check out the background if you consider approaching such a person, or are approached by one. Make sure they know what they are talking about.

## WHEN TO QUIT

Many groups will face the question, "Should we quit or carry on?" at some time in their existence — some face it quite frequently. Many groups form, in fact, around one issue only, and many have no need to continue after that.

Keep firmly in mind that there is no reflection on a group or its members if they decide the group no longer serves a purpose. It may be much better for active people involved in their community to move on to other challenges more deserving of their attention.

If the group has dwindled in numbers and enthusiasm to the point where it can no longer function, it is better to call a meeting of those still interested, and suggest a resolution to "kill" the organization. Either this will happen, or the ensuing discussion might suggest new endeavours that might be undertaken to revitalize the group.

Any money left on hand could be passed, if members agree, to another active organization working for an acceptable cause, given to a charity or medical research fund acceptable to your members, or deposited in a bank until some future issue requires the forma-



tion of a new group. If this is done, make sure all your group (and the bank, of course) know to whom the money could be paid and under what circumstances. If the amount is substantial, legal help might enable you to set up a trusteeship.

Current thinking suggests this is better than the old way some groups operated in the past — meeting an issue, then going into ‘limbo’ for a few years until something else required attention. When that happens, no one knows for sure if the organization still exists, and any new or potential group workers in a community are reluctant to start up a new group and perhaps tread on a lot of toes. Consequently, many opportunities for effective work are missed while everyone waits for someone else to “do something.”

Self-evaluation by a group should be a continuing thing, and when that evaluation says it's time to quit, don't fight it.

## 4. SOME OF THE MORE TECHNICAL QUESTIONS

The pages you have read so far should give a beginner some fair idea about how to form a group, and where to obtain help when it is wanted.

In the early days of your group, other questions may be raised and decisions may be faced that involve more than simply calling a group together and setting up a few meetings — questions about such technical sounding subject like “communications,” “structure,” “group relationships” and so on.

This last section will attempt to give you some ideas from the volunteer's point of view. It won't answer every question that arises, but will give some background information to help you find your own answers when the need arises.

### STRUCTURE OR BE FREE . . .

Some community groups seem to have been organized by the sort of people who are sticklers for every detail. They like to see a group's constitution or by-laws spell out everything to the maximum degree.

This is what is called a highly structured group — when everything is laid out in detail in an organization's rules and regulations. A perfect example might be your own Municipal Government, with all its committees, departments, and books full of by-laws necessary for it to function effectively. This is structure far in excess of the needs of a community group.

Most of us are reasonably familiar with this kind of structure, from observation if not experience, and even when we are organizing to meet one of these structured bodies, we tend to adopt the same kind of structure ourselves. It's often the only way we know.

On the other hand, a group might meet up with a recent university graduate who says, “Structure? What do you need structure for?” and then proceeds to explain how a group can dispense with tools like constitutions, executive officers, committees, by-laws, and so on.

“You don’t need a chairman or president,” he may say — “simply rotate the duties among your membership.”

There is enough truth in these arguments to make them sound believable, and it is admitted that this unstructured organization will be suitable for some groups: not only a debating club, but perhaps a council of local organizations sharing information, even if the local organizations are really committees of a handful of people. Each group could supply a chairman in rotation, and make its own notes of items of interest. Open forum groups, which may discuss issues but pass no resolutions and take no action, are another example.

For the majority of citizen groups — especially those handling money or engaging in ‘action’ of some kind, the totally unstructured set-up can be highly dangerous. It provides no restriction on who is to handle the group’s funds, and how; it makes it even more difficult to establish control over highly enthusiastic members who insist on going their own way regardless of group opinion. It also fails to provide a formalized basis for settling disputes among members.

It might also be added that the use of money by a group is one of the most frequent sources of discontent amongst members of that group.

One final hazard of the unstructured group is that it is more open to the smooth-talking individual who sees the group as a vehicle to be used for some hidden purpose — good or bad. When this happens, it is not until most of the original membership has left that someone asks, “What went wrong?”

Too much structure, on the other hand, can inhibit the group in a different way. If the purpose of the organization is detailed in the constitution as, “To organize and present objections to there-zoning of . . . . area.” then the group has given itself no mandate for future work on problems connected with day care in the area, youth activities, local pollution, or anything else.

The group could work on the same original project, and leave the future much more flexible if the constitution were to state instead:

“The purpose of . . . organization is to bring the greatest possible benefit to area residents in the fields of health, recreation, general education and social welfare.”

This sort of wording allows the group to do anything reasonable and still be free to face some future issue or crisis.

Many groups seem to have found the right balance between too much structure, and none at all; a new group should try to leave some provision for changes in its constitution at fairly frequent intervals as it grows in experience.

It is suggested that new groups, desiring some structure, limit the formality to an outline of the purpose of the group, control of money, duties and terms of its leaders, and future dissolution. It is always easier to add more when the group needs it, than it is to remove structure once it has been created.

## COMMUNICATIONS AND PUBLICITY

Most groups need publicity at some time, either to reach out to potential new members, to advise the community at large about concerns or activities of the group, or to gain support around an issue.

At the same time, several groups have felt that the press has ‘used’ them, or their activities, only for sensationalism. Thus they become very reluctant to contact the media.

Consequently it may be wise to take note of how your local media handles citizen group news. Don’t forget that citizen groups are new to you, and may be new to the media people as well — they may simply not understand what you are doing or what you are trying to achieve.

It does seem reasonable to comment that the press will often give much more coverage to a sit-in or demonstration than it will to the constructive and on-going activities of most groups that may be rather less sensational, although equally or perhaps more worthwhile.

When your group wishes to advise the news media about a matter, the usual method is by a “Press release.”



This is a written statement by the group about the subject, and should advise the editor “WHO-WHAT-WHY-WHEN-WHERE.” It should also include the name and address of the sending group, and a contact person and telephone number for use if more information is required by the paper.

The press release should always be double-spaced, typewritten one side of a page only, with a wide margin on both sides. Try to use only one page if possible, and give the editor a clear indication when he has reached the end of the item. This is traditionally done by typing –30– two or three lines below the final line. Miss out on any of these suggestions, and you increase the risk that your press release will end up in the wastebasket.

Keep in your own mind, when sending a press release, that what seems to you to be a big story may not be so to a busy news editor. If you have the opportunity for a personal contact, take the release to the paper(s) in person.

Radio, and sometimes even TV should not be overlooked as useful media, either for press releases or public service announcements about forthcoming public meetings. Many stations are happy to co-operate if your group gives them fair notice.

Many groups remember the need for communication, or publicity, outside their membership or area, but sometimes overlook the even more important need to communicate with members and potential members of the group.

There are various ways to do this – one of the most effective is the periodic group newsletter. This is especially useful to a neighbourhood, community, or cultural group engaged in many different activities.

Internal communications can be seen as an important way of advertising. It's often not enough to put a message across only once – it should be done several times (if possible) to reach everyone. Each member of a group engaged in many functions, may be familiar with only a few of them.

Seek out your own method of communicating – newsletters, a local news column in the weekly press, public meetings, word of mouth whenever possible, perhaps a system of area representatives each serving one block or one floor of an apartment building.



Your area representatives can also help with the distribution of notices or newsletter, and carry feed-back as well. This is most important.

Effective communications must be two-way communications. It's not enough for an executive committee to advise the membership about all the good work it is doing. It must have the ability to hear what people are saying in the area or membership, and it must be able to respond.

Good two-way communications will help to hold the group together, make it a viable and effective organization, and promote the ideal of frequent self-evaluation.

## INVOLVING MORE PEOPLE

Think about some of the more critical comments you may have heard from some people involved in citizen groups:

"The apathy around here is appalling"

"Our committee has to do everything"

"They all want the benefits, but no-one wants to help"

"We had several meetings, but hardly anyone came"

"We haven't had elections because no-one wants to run for office"

"People only come out if it's a big issue"

Any of these sound familiar? Are they valid complaints?

Let's look at some realities!

There is apathy in many areas, but not as much as some people think. Many individuals are concerned, but have little knowledge to work from and are scared they might make themselves look silly. Some also fear retribution from some source or other. Many have grown up in an atmosphere of 'keep cool — don't get involved' or 'the experts know best.' These people need encouragement to participate and state their opinions.

A committee that 'has to do everything' often does so because it WANTS to do everything. Committee members feel a sense of their own importance, and feel they can do a better job anyway.

Not so. People very seldom volunteer for a job, but some would love to be asked!

No-one wants to help? One can't expect a mother of four or five young children to devote three evenings a week to supervising a drop-in centre. Nor can a man who works shift commit himself for regular attendance at anything, but MOST people are willing to take a share within their own capability. The more people your group has working, the less each individual has to do and the stronger the group becomes.

If people don't come to meetings, it may be because they didn't know about it, or didn't get enough notice to make suitable baby-sitting arrangements, had a prior commitment, or perhaps the topic under discussion was not of sufficient interest. Make sure your organization's meetings are interesting, and give everyone there a chance to participate. Everyone likes to believe his own opinions and views are important, and in a community group, they *are* important.

When nobody will run for office in an organization, it may be because those in office have taken too much on themselves and no one person will take it all over; it may be because they feel enmity might be caused with those gaining personal satisfaction from holding the office; it may also be **BECAUSE NO ONE EVER ASKED**, personally and sincerely!

People will come out for a big issue, because they recognize how it will affect them, and their lives or families. You don't get hundreds at any meeting, but careful publicity might point out how important a subject really is when people hadn't given it much thought before. An example might be the issue of pollution, almost unheard of a few years ago. This goes to show how very important your pre-meeting publicity is.

No one has yet found the whole answer to getting people involved, but a well-run group who can sincerely offer an invitation and a purpose will have the most success. Just remember (it cannot be over-emphasized) – we all like to feel that we count for something and that our personal views are important. When group leaders recognize this, they are on the way to having a well-supported group.

One word of warning. Don't get too carried away!

Some complaints have been heard about a group executive committee that tries to hand off everything, refusing to do even its own job. They, too, might wonder why more people don't get involved!

## RELATIONSHIPS WITH OTHER GROUPS

As your group gets itself organized, it will undoubtedly run into difficulties that seem, at first sight, insurmountable. As suggested in earlier sections, quite often a group that has been going longer can help.

Even beyond that, while many of the projects your group work on will be strictly local projects, there will also be times when you want to work on something that affects a borough, a whole city, a province, or even all Canada! For example, your group might want to start a day care centre, but isn't day care a national, or at the very least, a provincial problem? Many others must support your concerns. Your group might be organizing around a proposed zoning change, but won't that change also affect other communities around you? Pollution, while sometimes local in nature, is by no means a local problem only; neither is education, adult or children's.

You will therefore need to know who has groups going around you in the same general area, the same city, province, and so on. You may find several groups all sharing similar concerns, and collective action with them can not only save your members time and duplicated effort, but it may be also very much more effective if many groups co-operate.

Your group may be very well advised to affiliate with the 'umbrella' group of its choice — whichever seems closest to meeting your need. When doing so, make sure that your group remains independent and autonomous (self-governing), and that it will be consulted fully before any decisions are made in its name. Most umbrella organizations are quite careful about this, but it pays to be sure. Check to see what (if anything) is required of your group, and what your group is offered.

Just as within your own group, member organizations within an umbrella body will receive as much as they put into it.

Having made your choice, select your representatives, and be sure to make provision at your own meetings for them to report

back to you about what is happening elsewhere. It makes no sense to be gathering information if no one in the group gets to hear it.

Many organizations don't realize the fact, especially at the early stages of their development, but many similar problems face folk festival groups, cultural groups, welfare rights groups and businessmen's associations, arts and crafts groups, food co-operatives drop-in centres and community school groups. When they all get together, citizen involvement will be a powerful tool indeed.

When you have gathered available information about the possible umbrella organizations with which your group might affiliate, it is wise to put the matter before your full membership rather than treat it as an executive decision only. Inter-group co-operation requires, at times, more than just a present committee, and potential future leaders should know what is going on. Make your recommendations, but, as in all things, allow the group to make the final decision knowing all relevant facts.

## GATHERING INFORMATION

Part of your relationship with other groups will be an in-flow of information useful to your group, and an awareness of "know-how" that might otherwise take months to develop. Depending on your special interests, your sources of information need not stop there.

A single-purpose organization can usually identify sources of information about its special interest simply by reading and listening.

A group formed for many different purposes has to go much further afield, and into a much wider range of subjects.

Affiliation of at least one member of the group to other organizations can result in many leads to information when needed, or can add sources and contacts which are always good to have.

Futhermore, as many of your group as possible should get to know your local school trustee(s), alderman(men), provincial and federal members of parliament, school principal(s), local church clergy, and the staff of local newspapers. The local elected representatives are available and willing to help you with information about resources available and any concerns you may have.



Leaders, at least, should become familiar with both government and private services available in the community:— libraries, information centres, cultural, recreational, day care, emergency home-help services, services for pensioners, etc. Sooner or later, someone in your group will need such information.

**THE WHOLE PROCESS OF COLLECTING INFORMATION USEFUL TO YOUR GROUP SHOULD NEVER CEASE.**

## **THE ROLE OF THE COMMUNITY WORKER**

When you feel you need professional assistance, there are several 'consultant' services available to your group without charge. Generally speaking, these consultants, who will meet with you at your request on a matter of specific concern to you, are dedicated people on whom you can rely.

"Community Development" is a popular phase, and all kinds and types of people are presenting themselves as 'community workers.' Some have neither field training — that is actually being involved within a group — nor academic training to qualify them for the job. Such people MAY do your group more harm than good. The biggest fear groups have is the so-called community worker who only wants to use the group for his or her own purpose.

Fortunately, these are pretty rare, but there is no central registry or source of information about such people to help you to identify which kind any individual may be. It is suggested that, if you have doubts, you should check with either a known or recommended consultant, and find out where, when, and with what group(s) the prospective community worker has been involved. You will then be able to learn more even if from another city.

In the meantime (and the same applies to ANY community worker) you must make absolutely sure that he or she works under the direction of your group, and does the work your group wants him to do. He (or she, of course) must report back to your group, not to somewhere else giving you no control. Most good community workers DO work this way, and will appreciate you 'laying it on the line.' That's just the way they would want it to be.



## 5. CONCLUSION

This booklet cannot attempt to tell you everything about citizen and community groups.

It is hoped that you have received from it some basic ideas with which you can get started. By participating in a citizen group you are taking part in our democratic society in a meaningful way. The introduction said you would run into frustrations — and you will, but they are outweighed by many rewarding experiences.

“Citizenship” will be to you, and your group, something more than an expression or a piece of paper; whatever the nature of your group, each member may rightfully feel that his community, city, province, and country have received benefit from every effort — no matter how small.

## APPENDIX "A"

### Sample Constitution Clauses

The following suggestions have been put, as far as possible, into everyday language. They are adequate for most unincorporated groups. If your group plans to incorporate, a legal advisor should be consulted.

Start by stating the name of the organization, and who may join:

The name of the organization shall be the Harvest Heights Community Association, and it shall be comprised of such persons who reside in the Harvest Heights area and who have paid the required membership fee.

Then give the purpose of the group:

The Association shall be operated in a manner so as to bring the greatest possible benefit to area residents in the fields of health, recreation, general education, and social welfare.

The Association shall try to encourage the idea of citizen participation in community affairs.

The Association shall be a vehicle for collective action on matters of concern to its members.

If the group is to have officers (or executives), states how many, their titles, and how often they should be elected:

Annually, during the months of . . . . or . . . ., or at the first opportunity thereafter, the following officers shall be elected by the membership: Chairman, two vice-chairmen, secretary and treasurer. These five officers shall form the executive committee of the Association.

State what the membership fee is to be:

There shall be a membership fee of one dollar per family per calendar year, payable in advance.

and then, who is to control Association money:

All funds belonging or entrusted to the Association shall be under the control of the Treasurer, who will present a statement of accounts to the membership (quarterly annually). All funds shall be deposited in a financial institution which is a member of the Canada Deposit Insurance Corporation, and the signatures of the Treasurer and any one other officer shall be required to withdraw funds.

You may then wish to restrict spending large sums:

All expenditures over (fifty dollars) shall be submitted to the general membership for prior approval.

Many groups like to include a clear statement about affiliations:

The Association may in no way be connected with, or affiliated with any single political party, religious institution or commercial enterprise. It may establish desired relationships with other citizen or community organizations that have no partisan political, religious or commercial affiliation, provided that no controls are imposed on the Association.

A group should always specify how future additions or amendments may be made to its constitution:

This constitution may be amended by simple majority vote at any Annual General Meeting.

And the final point, to allow for dissolution when the group is no longer functioning:

The Executive Committee may, at its discretion dissolve the Association if its members believe it no longer serves any purpose, with any funds left on hand (state disposal).

Other items could of course be included — these are basics providing minimum structure. If you wish more, ask some other groups for copies of their constitution or by-laws for further ideas.













Ontario Ministry  
of Citizenship  
and Culture

Multiculturalism  
and Citizenship  
Division

Hon. Bruce McCaffrey  
Minister  
Ward Cornell  
Deputy Minister



















